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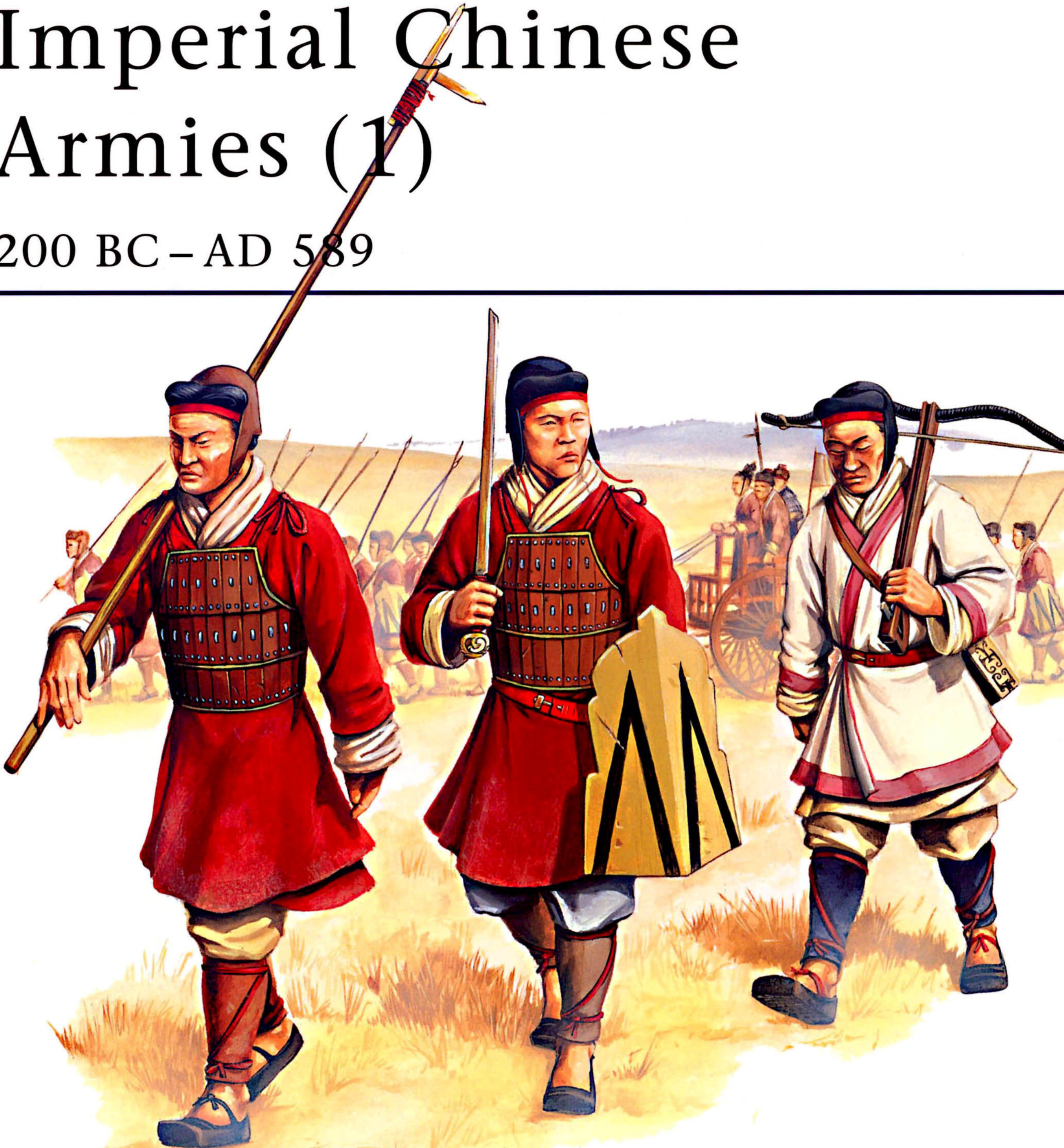
Imperial Chinese Armies (1)

200 BC – AD 589



C J Peers • Illustrated by Michael Perry

An acknowledged expert on ancient Chinese armies, CJ PEERS has written several books on this subject for Osprey's Men-at-Arms series, including Men-at-Arms 218: *Ancient Chinese Armies 1500–200 BC* and Men-at-Arms 251: *Medieval Chinese Armies 1260–1520*.

MICHAEL PERRY started producing miniature figures for the wargames industry in the late 1970s while still at school, and for many years he has worked for both Games Workshop and Wargames Foundry. He has a highly distinctive and realistic style, and has illustrated a number of Osprey publications including Men-at-Arms 275: *The Taiping Rebellion* and Campaign 54: *Shiloh 1862*. His work will also be familiar to readers of many popular wargame magazines including *Military Modelling*.

Men-at-Arms • 284

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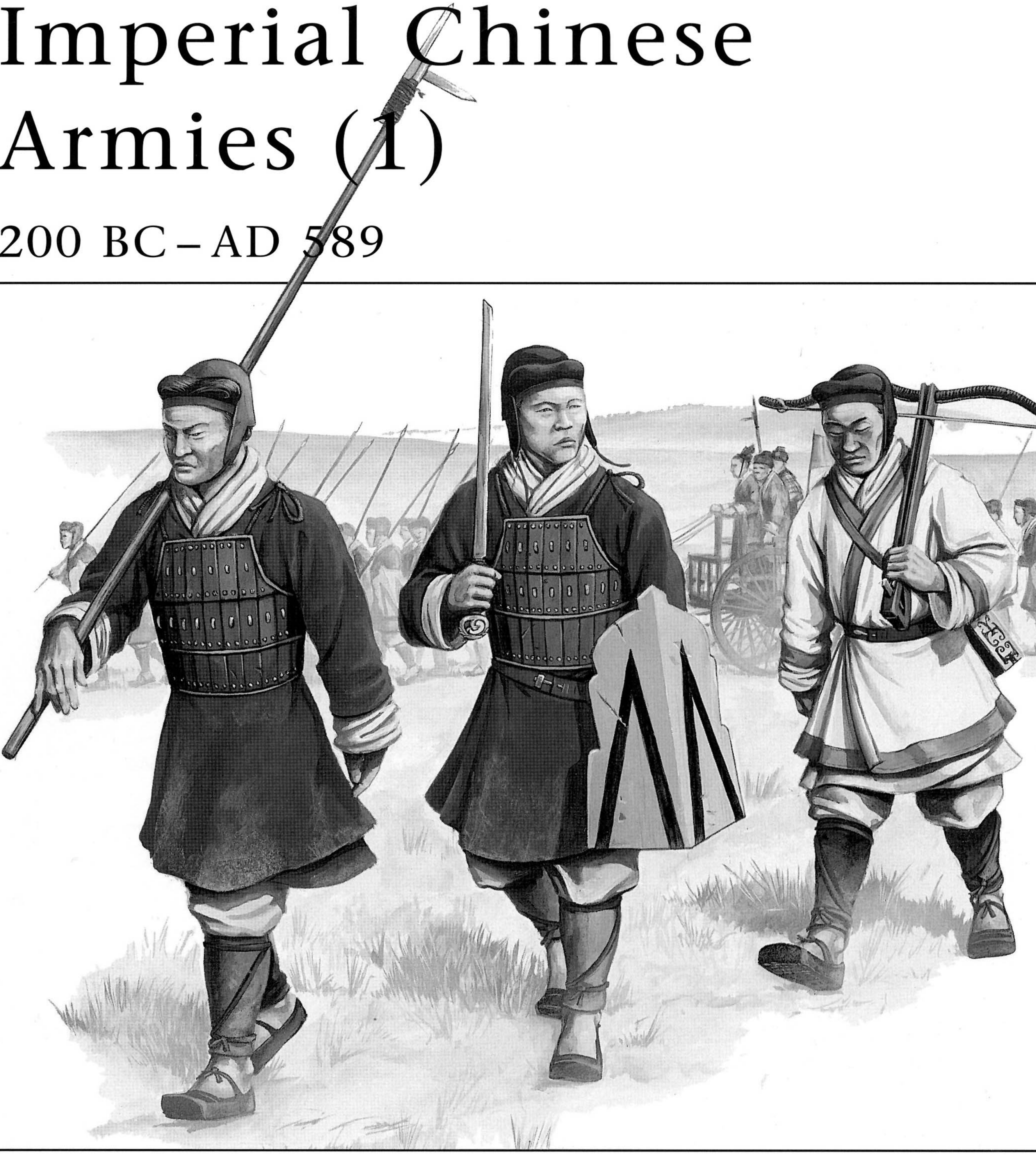

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The Marketing Manager, Osprey Direct UK,
PO Box 140, Wellingborough, Northants,
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Michael Perry
3 Quorn Close
Attenborough
Nottingham
NG9 6BU

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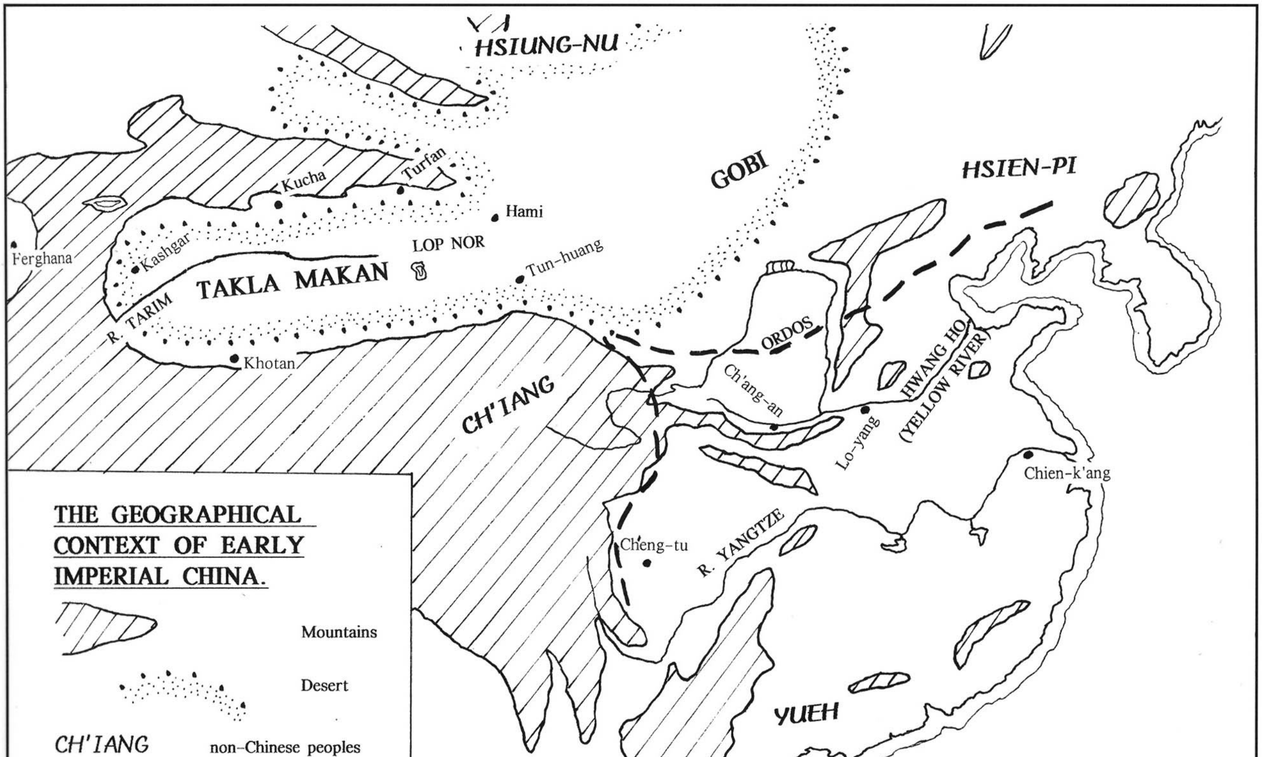
IMPERIAL CHINESE ARMIES (I)

INTRODUCTION

In the early 2nd century BC it must have seemed as though chaos, rather than unity, was the natural state of Chinese civilisation. Shih Huang-ti, the famous 'First Emperor' of the Ch'in dynasty, had unified the various Warring States in 221 BC, after more than five centuries of political fragmentation (see MAA 218 *Ancient Chinese Armies 1500 BC–200 BC*), but the union foundered following his death. As K'uai T'ung reminded the first Han Emperor, 'The Empire slipped from the House of Ch'in like a fleeing deer and all the world joined in its pursuit.' Eventually one of those 'hunters', Liu Pang – a former minor official of the Ch'in, succeeded, through sheer persistence, in reunifying the Chinese heartland (although parts of the south remained independent for several more decades). Liu's base had been his fief of Han-chung, in the north-west, and it was after this locality that he named his regime, adopting the title of Emperor Kao-ti of Han.

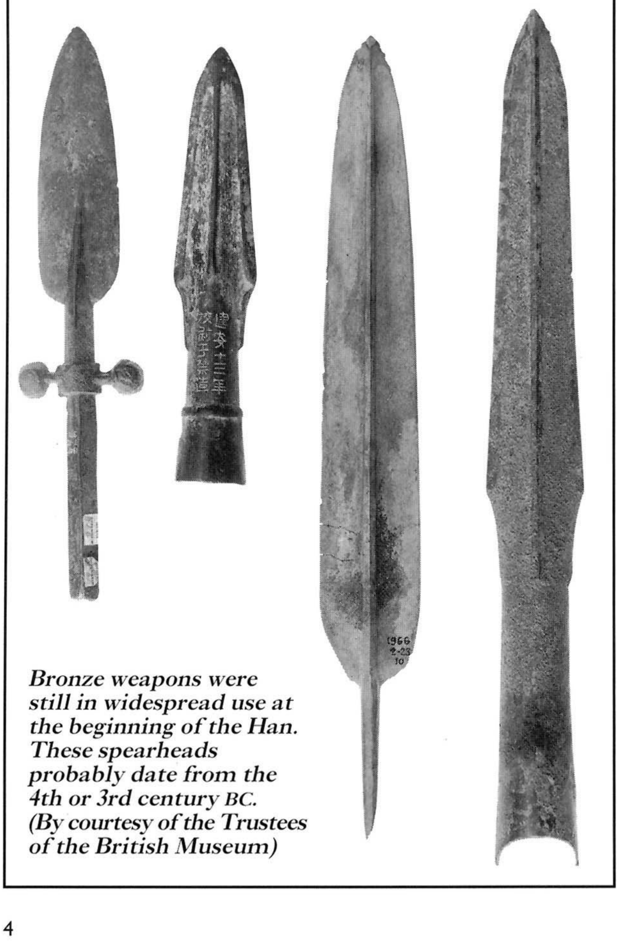
Despite persistent attempts to play it down, Han's debt to Ch'in was enormous. The concept of the 'One Man' – the 'Son of Heaven' who acted as the intermediary between Heaven and Earth – was already centuries old, but not until the Ch'in had the prestige of an imperial title been combined with real political power. From Shih Huang-ti's unification we can date the widespread acceptance of the concept that Chinese civilisation should be subject to control by a central government and have as its figurehead a


THE GEOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT OF EARLY IMPERIAL CHINA.

Mountains
Desert
CH'IANG non-Chinese peoples
approximate limit of settled agriculture
YI
HSIUNG-NU
GOBI
HSIEN-PI
Kucha
Turfan
Hami
Ferghana
Kashgar
LOP NOR
Tun-huang
TAKLA MAKAN
R. TARIM
Khotan
ORDOS
Ch'ang-an
HWANG HO (YELLOW RIVER)
Lo-yang
CH'IANG
Chien-k'ang
Ch'eng-tu
R. YANGTZE
YUEH

single man. The long rule of the Han gave this ideal the sanction of tradition and successful precedent, but in the years following that dynasty's collapse, at the end of the 2nd century AD, the Empire's confidence in this ideal was to be severely tested.

The armed forces of the China which was unified by the Sui in AD 589 were very different from those of Han Kao-ti, but paradoxically, many of the most significant changes had occurred not under the powerful Han Empire but later, during a time of political division and weakness. After AD 304 the 'five barbarians' – the tribes of the Hsiung-nu, Chieh, Hsien-pi, Ch'iang and Ti – divided north China among themselves, setting up dynasties which were often Chinese only in name, and feuding constantly both with each other and with the native states, whose stronghold was now in the south. It was under this barbarian influence that the heavily-armoured cavalry which were to become the striking force of the great T'ang dynasty in the 7th and 8th centuries first developed.



Bronze weapons were still in widespread use at the beginning of the Han. These spearheads probably date from the 4th or 3rd century BC. (By courtesy of the Trustees of the British Museum)

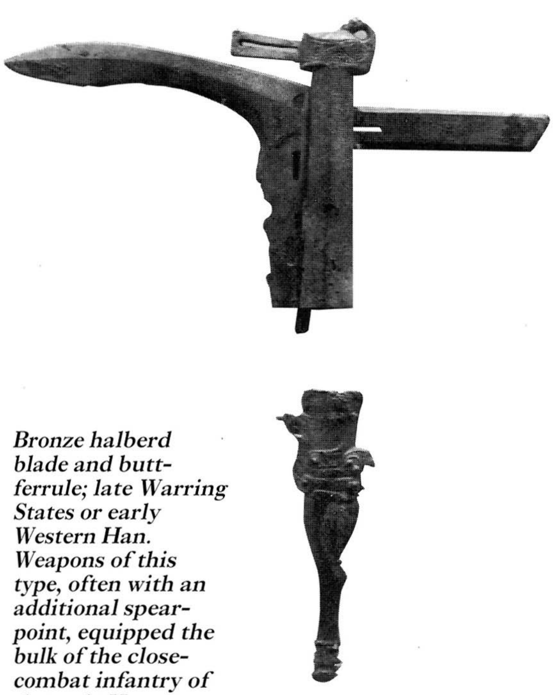
It would be impossible to gloss over this revolution in warfare simply because its early protagonists were not ethnically Chinese, but the question does arise about which regimes of the period should be included as 'Chinese' armies. I have tried to be as comprehensive as possible, and have included all those states within the territory formerly held by the Han, which adopted a native dynastic title, but with some 16 different states in the north alone between AD 304 and AD 500, space prevents detailed consideration of them all. Many of the 'barbarian' peoples founded empires which stretched far into central Asia, but they are covered here only to the extent that they impinged on China proper. A note of caution is appropriate, however: the common identification of the Hsiung-nu with the Huns who invaded Europe in the late 4th century has nothing to recommend it beyond a shared nomadic lifestyle. Descriptions of the physical appearance of the two peoples are very different, and the theory that the Hsiung-nu were driven west by the Chinese meets the major objection that the opposite was happening during the 4th century – a power vacuum was attracting the Hsiung-nu eastwards into China itself. A similar connection between the Juan-juan, who fought the Northern Wei dynasty in the 5th century, and the Avars, who appeared in Europe in the 560s, is perhaps more likely, but by no means certain. (The Hsiung-nu, the Juan-juan and the Toba clan of the Hsien-pi are also dealt with in Elite 30, *Attila and the Nomad Hordes*.)

During the period covered by this book China was open to central Asian influence – and vice versa – as never before, and strategic considerations often revolved around the geographical features of the vast hinterland – the deserts and mountains – and the constraints that these imposed upon the Chinese way of life. For this reason a simplified map has been included. The political complexity of the era has also required the inclusion of maps illustrating the boundaries of the various competing dynasties, and it may be instructive to study these in conjunction with the first. In particular, the remarkable stability of the northern and western frontiers of China, despite the various regimes that occupied those areas, can be better understood in the light of the limits of rainfall adequate for settled agriculture.

Our sources for the military history of the Early

Imperial period are somewhat more diverse than those for earlier ages. The tradition of dynastic histories begun in the Han period by Ssu-ma Ch'ien and Pan Ku continued almost unbroken throughout, but few are available in translation. In many cases, furthermore, the compilers showed little interest in the details of military affairs; it is instructive to compare Ssu-ma Ch'ien's lively and anecdotal biographies (see the section on suggested further reading, below), full of accounts of stratagems and feats of arms, with the dry annalistic style preferred by Pan Ku a century later. Ssu-ma Kuang, a Sung historian, also covered this era in his *Tzu Chih T'ung Chien*, a compilation of many older texts, parts of which are available in English translation.

Archaeological finds are an important source, but the replacement of bronze with iron, which is less easily preserved, means that few specimens of armour or weapons survive in good condition. Luckily the tradition of burying bronze or pottery figures with the deceased continued throughout the period, and several miniature 'terracotta armies' from the Han have been excavated in recent years. Especially notable are the Yang-chia-wan figures, of uncertain date but almost certainly early Western Han, in armour reminiscent of Ch'in Shih Huang-ti's famous warriors (see the reconstructions in Plate B) and the recent discovery of a silk-clad burial army belonging to the Emperor Ching-ti (157–141 BC). Also of great value are the wooden strips on which early Han records were kept, a collection of which from Edsin-gol on the northern frontier forms the source material for Michael Loewe's invaluable work on the dynasty's military administration (see Further Reading).



Bronze halberd blade and butt-ferrule; late Warring States or early Western Han. Weapons of this type, often with an additional spear-point, equipped the bulk of the close-combat infantry of the early Han. (British Museum)

CHRONOLOGY

202 BC	Kao-ti reunifies China under the Han dynasty.
200 BC	Kao-ti defeated by Hsiung-nu at P'ing-ch'eng.
177–166 BC	Major incursions by Hsiung-nu.
154 BC	Revolt of the King of Wu.
141 BC	Accession of Wu-ti, the 'Martial Emperor'.
139–113 BC	Chang Ch'ien's explorations in the far west.
133 BC	Beginning of Han offensive against Hsiung-nu.
121–119 BC	Wei Ch'ing and Huo Ch'u-ping defeat Hsiung-nu.
111–108 BC	Conquest of Tien and K'un-ming in Yunnan.
108 BC	Conquest of Ch'ao-hsien in Korea.
104–101 BC	'War of the Heavenly Horses' against Ferghana.
51 BC	Peace agreed with Hsiung-nu.
AD 8-25	Hsin dynasty of Wang Mang.
AD18–27	Red Eyebrow rebellion.
AD 23	Wang Mang defeated by Han forces at K'un-yang.
AD 25	'Eastern' or 'Later' Han founded by Liu Hsiu.
AD 40–43	Revolt of the Trung sisters in Yueh (Vietnam).
AD 73–89	Renewed offensive against Hsiung-nu.
AD 108–111	Great Ch'iang raids into Yellow River plain.
AD 184	Outbreak of Yellow Turban revolt.

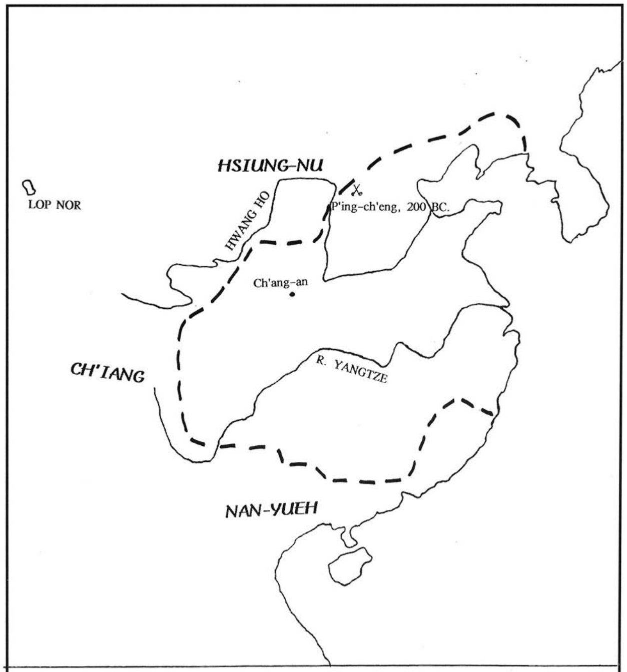
AD 189	Palace coup by Tung Cho. Collapse of Han power.
AD 220	Death of Ts'ao Ts'ao. His son is proclaimed King of an independent Wei state. Formal end of Han dynasty.
AD 263	Conquest of Shu Han by Wei.
AD 280–316	Temporary reunification under Ts'in dynasty.
c. **AD 310**	Introduction of cataphract cavalry equipment into China.
AD 311	Hsiung-nu capture Lo-yang. Collapse of Western Ts'in dynasty. 'Barbarian' kingdoms control north China.
AD 383	Northern attempt to conquer south China defeated at Fei River.
AD 387–534	Toba dynasty of Northern Wei in north China.
AD 420	Eastern Ts'in in south replaced by Liu-Sung dynasty.
AD 502–557	Liang dynasty in south.
AD 534–577	War in the north among successors to Northern Wei.
AD 581	Yang Chien seizes power in Northern Chou and founds Sui dynasty.
AD 589	Fall of Ch'en. Empire reunified under Yang Chien.

THE WESTERN HAN

202 BC–AD 25

The new Empire established by Han Kao-ti was largely modelled on the centralised Ch'in system, with its north-western heartland divided into 'commanderies' under governors appointed by the court. However, victory in the civil war against Hsiang Yu had been achieved only with the help of several powerful allies, who were then rewarded with semi-independent 'kingdoms' in the north, south and east. The strategic keys to north China were the natural strongholds formerly occupied by the states of Ch'in in the west and Ch'i in the east, so Kao-ti established his imperial capital in the former and made his son Liu Fei King of Ch'i. When the emperor felt secure enough, he began gradually to replace the other kings with his own relatives; eventually, in subsequent reigns, the kingdoms were absorbed piecemeal into the structure of the Empire. This was not achieved without bloodshed: as late as 154 BC the King of Wu led a major revolt in the south-east in protest at curbs on his independence. Kao-ti himself died from an arrow wound received in battle against Ch'ing Pu, the King of Huai-nan, in 195 BC.

At first, however, the most serious military threat to the Han was posed by the recently formed rival empire of the Hsiung-nu. This nomad confederation, based in Mongolia, was always to have an ambivalent relationship with the Chinese. Many of the contacts between the steppe herders and the settled farmers to the south were peaceful, as each produced goods for which the other desired to trade – in particular, horses, of which the Chinese were always short – but the temptation for both empires to define the vague frontier between agricultural China and the pastoral steppe in their own favour was irresistible. Furthermore, the Hsiung-nu provided a haven for disaffected Chinese subjects, including in Kao-ti's reign such high-ranking personages as Liu Hsin, King of Han, and Lu Wen, the King of Yen. The nomads had taken advantage of the chaos after the fall of Ch'in and plundered north China, and in



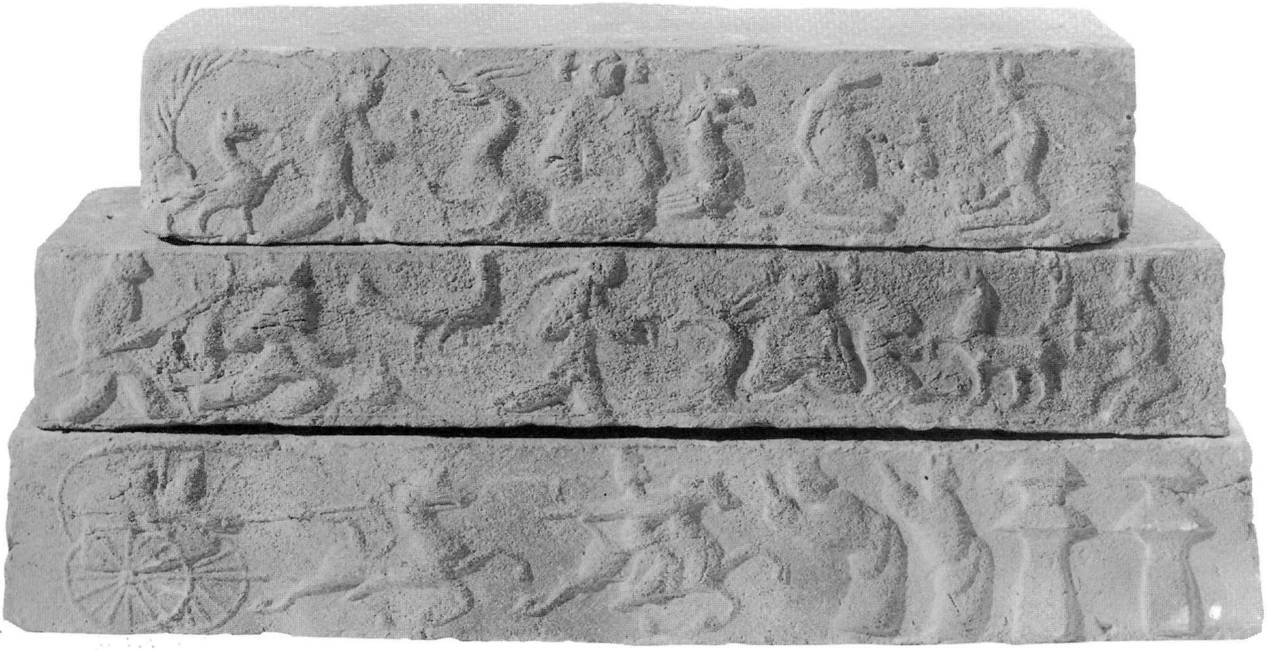
BOUNDARIES OF THE WESTERN HAN, c. 195 BC.

200 BC Kao-ti led a Han army into the steppe in pursuit of the raiders. At Mount Pai-teng, near P'ing-ch'eng in modern Shansi, the emperor was ambushed and surrounded for a week by thousands of Hsiung-nu cavalry. He avoided capture only with difficulty, and thereafter adopted a policy of buying off the nomads with tribute and diplomatic marriages rather than attempting to suppress them by military means.

This strategy was not entirely successful in preventing further raids, but it was not until 133 BC that the 'Martial Emperor' Wu-ti, confident of the Empire's growing strength and tempted by the explorer Chang Ch'ien's reports of the wealth to be gained from trade with the far west, reversed the policy and authorised aggressive campaigns into central Asia. The first Chinese move was a failed attempt to capture the unsuspecting Hsiung-nu ruler or *Shan-yu*, followed by a cavalry attack on nomads who had come to trade at markets along the frontier. The latter seems to have taken the enemy by surprise, and in 127 BC the Ordos region – a strategic base of great importance in the loop of the Yellow River – was brought under Han control. It was immediately organised into two new commanderies and settled with 100,000 Chinese colonists. Between 121 and 119 BC two outstanding generals, Wei Ch'ing and Huo Ch'u-ping, took their cavalry further west, overthrowing five subordinate Hsiung-nu kingdoms in two great converging sweeps; and a line of earthworks was built to extend the Ch'in defence line further into the steppe. For the next 18 years, there were no recorded Hsiung-nu raids into China.

After the capture of Turfan in 108 BC advances were made still further west, with the aim of controlling the already flourishing Silk Route trade with the Middle East, and of detaching the Hsiung-nu from their allies among the city-states of the Tarim Basin region. The most ambitious of these campaigns was the 'War of the Heavenly Horses'. The kingdom of Ta-yuan or Ferghana (west of the Pamirs, in modern Uzbekistan) was at the very edge of the known world at this time, but reports reached the Han court that its ruler possessed a herd of blood-sweating 'heavenly horses' of exceptional quality. Good mounts for cavalry were always in short supply in China, so an envoy was sent to demand some of the animals as tribute. The king of Ta-yuan refused, and in 104 BC Li Kuang-li was sent from the border post of Tun-huang with 6,000 steppe cavalry and 20,000 Chinese

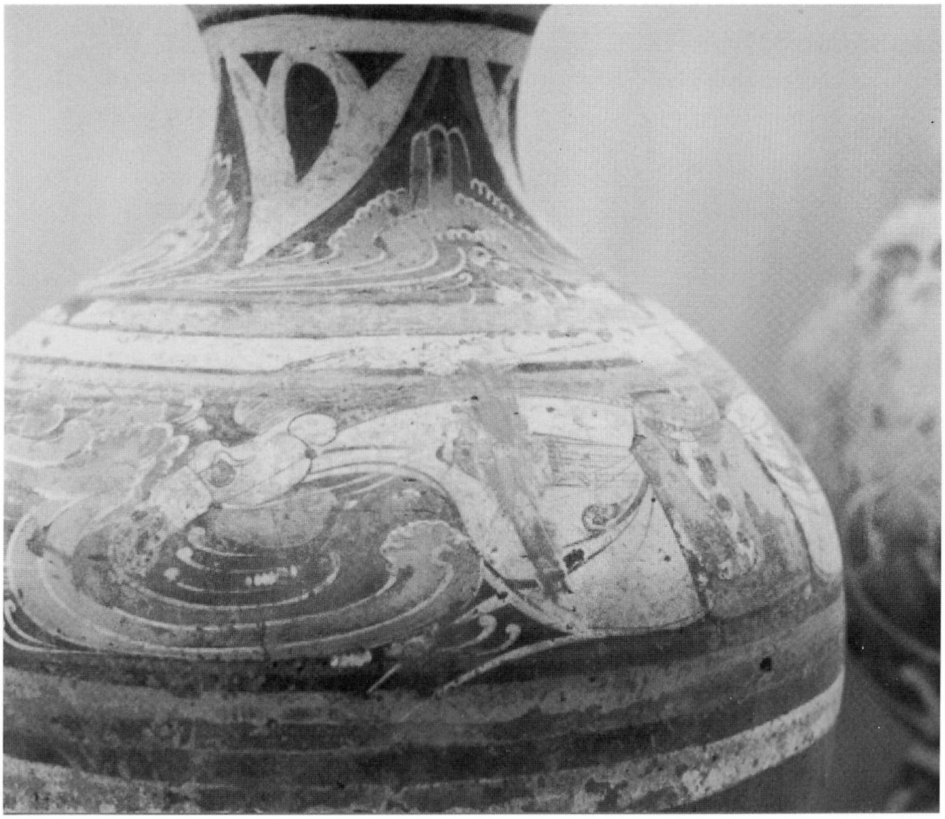
These bricks from Szechwan depict a mounted archer practising the rearward shooting technique known in the West as the 'Parthian shot'. (See Plate C.) (British Museum)



to enforce the demand. The route lay along the edge of the inhospitable Takla Makan desert, and supplies soon ran short. After a march of over 1,000 miles, Li arrived in Ta-yuan with the exhausted and starving remnants of his army and was forced to withdraw. He blamed the supply situation on the fact that his army had been too small to force the local city-states to co-operate, and was sent west again with reinforcements which brought his strength up to 60,000. Surprisingly, the extra manpower did solve the problem: most towns submitted to the overwhelming show of force and provided food, and those that did not were stormed. Li still lost half his force, but reached Ta-yuan with enough men to defeat the king and set up a puppet ruler in his place. The Han army returned in triumph with 3,000 horses. The Tarim Basin states were so overawed by the victory that they came over to the Han en masse, and garrisons were established throughout the 'Western Regions'.

Wu-ti's reign also saw advances in other theatres. In 113 BC an army was sent south to take P'an-yu (modern Canton), which had previously been part of the independent state of Southern Yueh, and in 110 BC Eastern Yueh, on the coast south of the Yangtze, was also brought under control. The existence of a trade route to India via the south-western kingdoms of Tien and K'un-ming, in present-day Yunnan, had been known since about 130 BC, but the K'un-ming blocked all attempts at exploration, and it was not until 109 BC that the area was occupied by a Han army. Tien had planned to resist, supported by other local tribes, and the Chinese had gone to the lengths of building an artificial lake to train troops in naval warfare in anticipation of battles on Lake K'un-ming, but in the event the area fell almost without a fight. Like the south-east, the far south-west was brought permanently into the sphere of Chinese civilisation, although the local tribes retained their warlike traditions and sporadic revolts remained a problem.

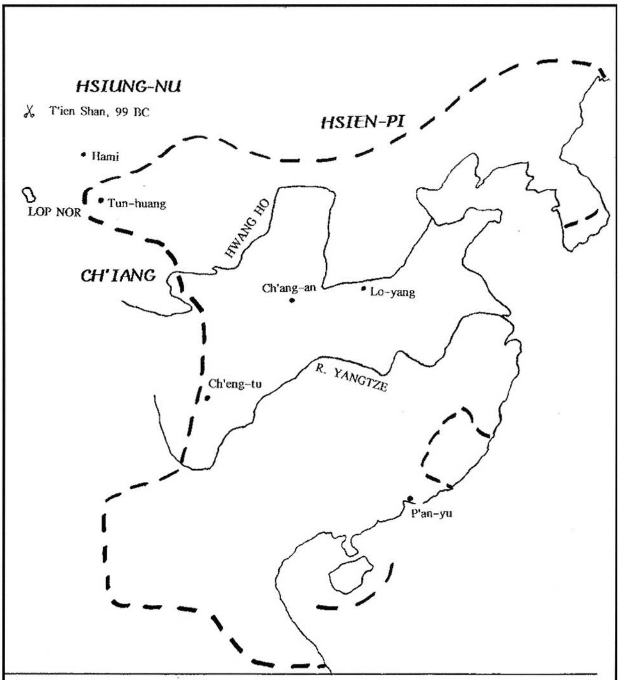
There were signs, however, that the Han armies were overextended, and that the resources built up during the decades of peace were being depleted. A perpetual horse shortage became a major problem in the 1st century BC. The Hsiung-nu inflicted two serious defeats in 99 and 90 BC – the last of which saw



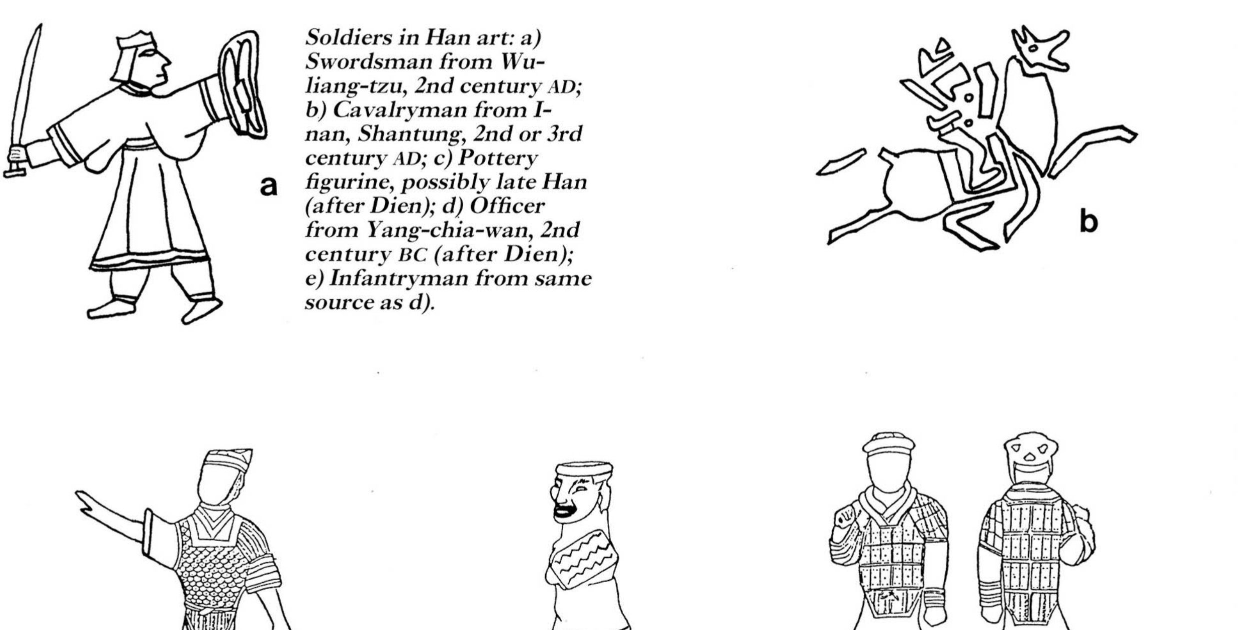
This Han vase depicts a variation on the popular mounted archer theme. (British Museum)

Li Kuang-li's capture – and raids resumed along the northern frontier, although the Western Regions were mostly quiet. After the death of Wu-ti in 87 BC, internal power struggles distracted the Han, but fortunately the Hsiung-nu were similarly split at this time. Gradual colonisation began to replace punitive expeditions as the instrument of control in central Asia after 61 BC, and under Yuan-ti (49–33 BC) the expansionist policy was virtually abandoned. However, despite the reluctance of Confucian officials at court to authorise more expensive adventures, in 36 BC another Chinese expedition penetrated west of the Pamirs (see *The Battle of Kang-chu*, below).

This campaign was the last great strategic advance of the Western Han in central Asia. In AD 9 Wang Mang, a nobleman who had acted as regent on behalf of several young emperors, proclaimed himself the founder of the Hsin dynasty. The Hsiung-nu tried to intervene, but Wang mobilised 300,000 men along the northern frontier and the nomads backed down. The new emperor began a series of radical social and political reforms, but was thwarted by forces beyond human control. The Yellow River



THE WESTERN HAN EMPIRE AT ITS GREATEST EXTENT, c. 108 BC.

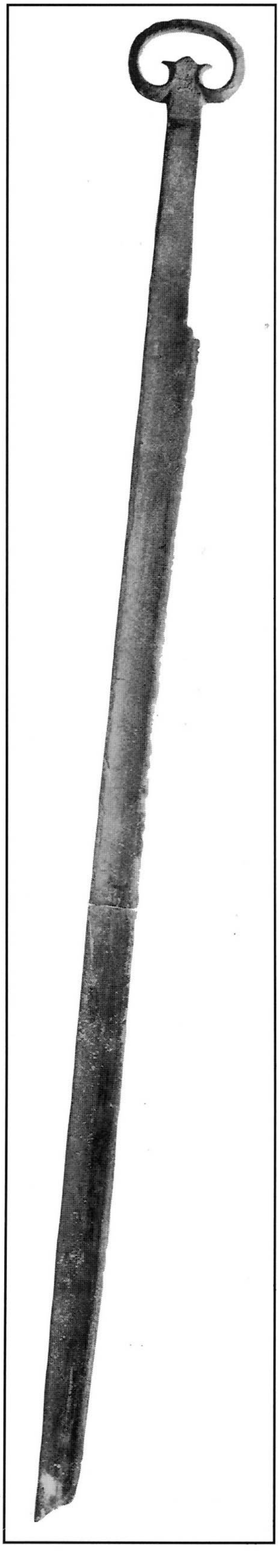


Soldiers in Han art: a) Swordsman from Wu-liang-tzu, 2nd century AD; b) Cavalryman from I-nan, Shantung, 2nd or 3rd century AD; c) Pottery figurine, possibly late Han (after Dien); d) Officer from Yang-chia-wan, 2nd century BC (after Dien); e) Infantryman from same source as d).

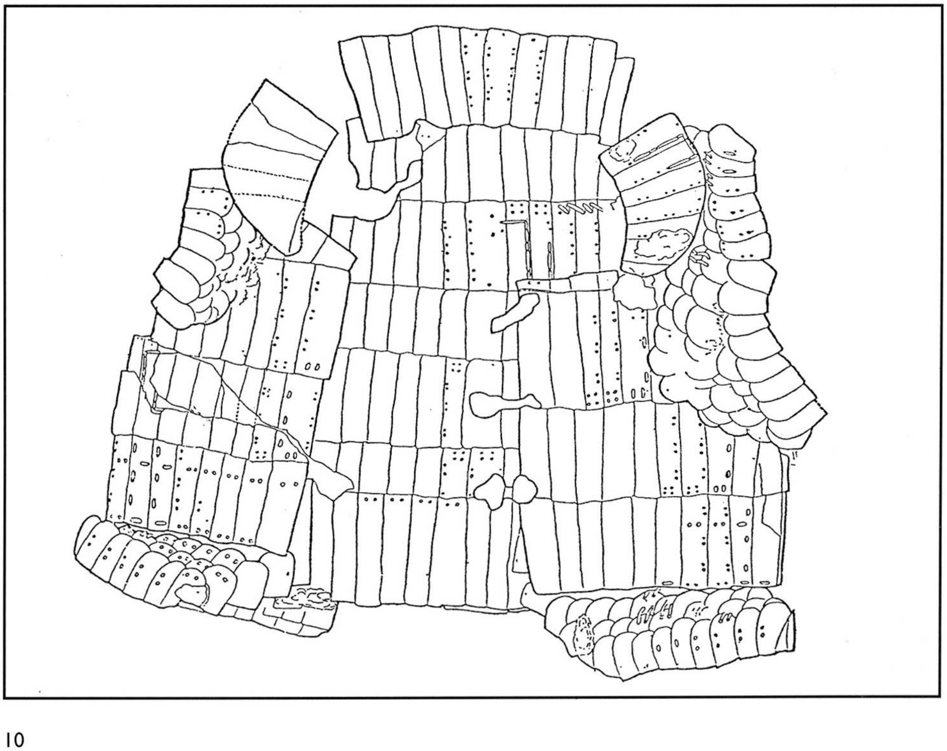
changed its course, causing widespread flooding and famine, and the eastern coastal region became a refuge for desperate peasants, many of whom turned to banditry. By AD 18 they were organised into a movement known as the Red Eyebrows – from their habit of painting their foreheads red – and were allied with local gentry campaigning for the restoration of the Han. With the government distracted, the Tarim Basin cities revolted and the Hsiung-nu moved in to fill the vacuum.

In AD 22 the rebel movements in the south came under the control of Liu Po-sheng, a distant descendant of Han Kao-ti. After several setbacks, the Han armies routed the Hsin forces at K'un-yang, and in the October of AD 23 the Red Eyebrows captured Chang-an and killed Wang Mang. In AD 25 the Later, or Eastern, Han was established at Lo-yang, the 'Eastern' capital (as opposed to Chang-an, the 'Western' capital, from where the dynasty had ruled until Wang Mang's usurpation) by Liu's brother, who became Emperor Kuang-wu-ti, but the Red Eyebrows remained in possession of Chang-an. Finally running short of supplies, they wandered further west into barren steppe country, where a combination of bad weather, hunger and attacks by local warlords defeated them. Early in AD 27, the rebels surrendered.

Bronze sword, Western Han. The ring-pommel is characteristic of Han swords. (British Museum)



Iron lamellar cuirass from Erh-shih-chia-tzu, Inner Mongolia. Han period. (After Dien)



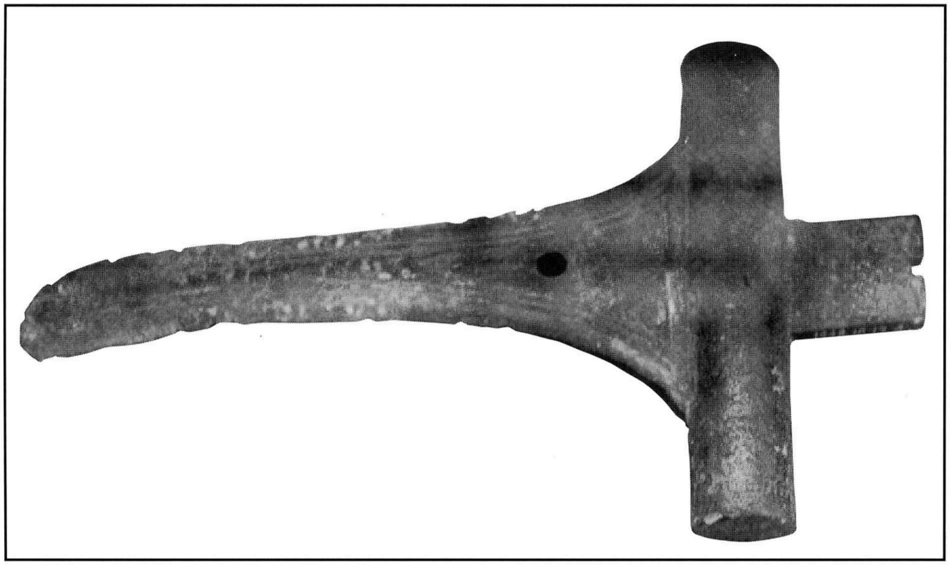
THE EASTERN HAN
AD 25–189

One enduring legacy of the reign of Wang Mang was the adoption of the concept of the 'Mandate of Heaven' as part of the imperial ideology. Previously the legitimacy of the regime had rested ultimately on military power, but from then on the influence of the Confucian intelligentsia led to a greater emphasis on the emperor's responsibility for the maintenance of the traditional order of society. This coincided with a growing disdain among the gentry for military affairs and a movement favouring a return to the policy of the Chou dynasty, which had allegedly attracted and tamed the barbarians by its obvious cultural superiority. Nevertheless, Kuang-wu-ti was quickly forced to rely on his army to enforce his authority against local officials who had set themselves up during the civil war as independent rulers. The most dangerous of these were Wei Ao in Kansu, who was suppressed in AD 34, and Kung-sun Shu in Szechwan, who held out until the end of AD 36. Even then the Empire was not at peace, for Hsiung-nu raids had resumed in the north and new fortifications had to be built along the frontier. In AD 49, however, the Hsiung-nu Empire split into two groups, and the Shan-yu of the southern horde made peace with China and was allowed to settle along the upper Yellow River as a buffer against his hostile northern rival.

In AD 73 the Han embarked on another phase of conquests in central Asia, with the reoccupation of Turfan and the fertile supply base of Hami. The Chinese and the southern Hsiung-nu united to attack the northern horde, and in AD 89 a Han army, under Tou Hsien, crossed the Gobi into Mongolia and routed the hostile tribes at Mount Ch'i-lo. At the same time, the Tarim Basin was being returned to Han control following the campaigns of Pan Chao, who with very few resources achieved his aim through a combination of diplomacy and actions of the utmost daring. On one occasion he led 40 men to attack the camp of a much larger Hsiung-nu delegation to a wavering city-state, setting fire to their tents while his archers picked off the barbarians as they ran out and other soldiers beat drums furiously to simulate a bigger force. The next morning he presented the local ruler with the head of the Hsiung-nu ambassador, and the city submitted. Pan Chao was honoured with the title of Protector General of the Western Regions in AD 92, and in 97 he sent out the famous expedition of Kan Ying with the aim of making direct contact with the Roman Empire. Parthian opposition caused this attempt to fail, but it illustrates how far China's sphere of influence then extended towards the west.

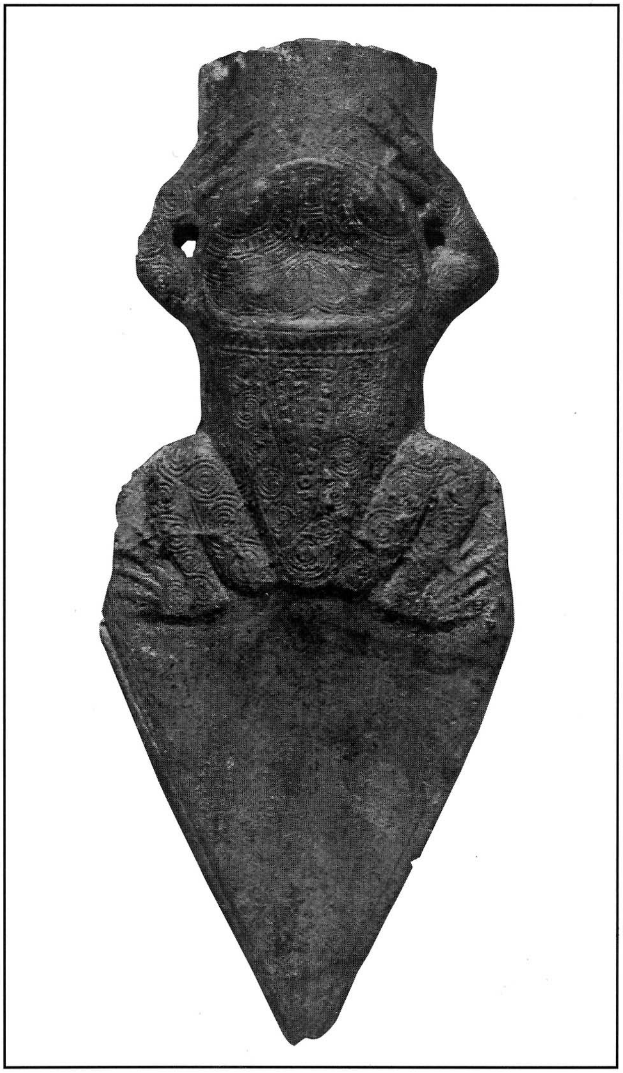
The Northern Hsiung-nu were also under attack from two of their subject tribes, the Wu-huan and Hsien-pi, based in eastern Mongolia and Manchuria. The former became allies of the Han from AD 49 onwards and provided cavalry for Chinese armies until the 3rd century, but the Hsien-pi were more difficult to control. Originally encouraged to attack the Hsiung-nu with the promise of a reward for every head taken, they demanded ever more expensive 'gifts' until by the late 1st century they were being bought off at ruinous cost. After AD 91 they took over much of the northern Hsiung-nu territory, and in the mid 2nd century they were united under T'an-shih-huai into a confederation said to have fielded 100,000 warriors. Although T'an-shih-huai's empire did not

Large numbers of distinctive bronze weapons, such as this axe-head, have been excavated from a 1st-century BC site at Liang-wang-shan in Yunnan. (British Museum)



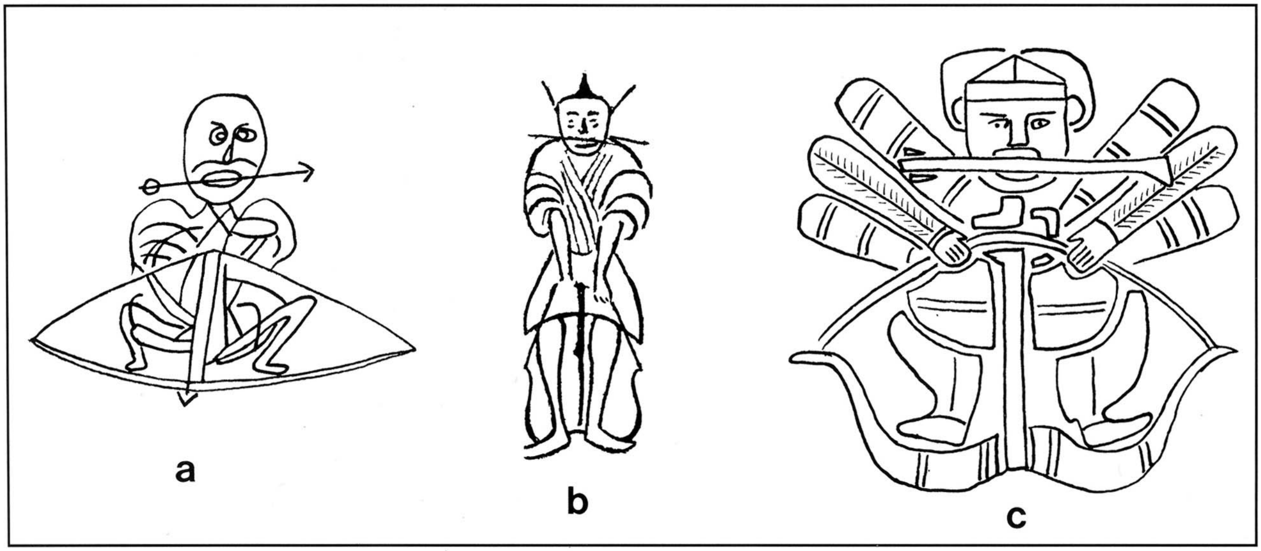
Halberd or dagger-axe blade, from a 1st century BC *site at Liang-wang-shan in Yunnan. (British Museum)*

Spearhead from Liang-wang-shan, with a socket in the shape of a frog. (British Museum)



survive his death in AD 180, the Han never found a way of dealing successfully with Hsien-pi raids. Ultimately an offensive policy against the steppe warriors could never be successful, as many officials recognised, because of geographical and climatic factors. Yen Yu had analysed the problem in Wang Mang's reign, explaining that lack of food and firewood, combined with the short life expectancy of the oxen which carried the supplies, prevented any campaign being sustained for longer than 100 days. Even such short expeditions into the steppe had to include long and vulnerable supply-trains (on one occasion '100,000 oxen, over 30,000 horses and tens of thousands of donkeys, mules and camels'). Under such conditions it was very difficult to bring the mobile nomad bands to battle if they wished to avoid it – a lesson in futility that can be likened to 'fishing in the Yangtze without a net'.

Early in the 1st century the Ch'iang tribes of the west added to the pressure on the Empire by beginning to move into the Kansu corridor, which had been occupied by the Han, partly in order to prevent the Ch'iang linking up with the Hsiung-nu. This nightmare became reality early in the 2nd century, and by 140 effective control of large areas of the north-west had been lost to marauding bands of Ch'iang, Hsiung-nu and disaffected Chinese. This cut communications with the Western Regions, and meant that they too were lost. Settlers had been sent into the area in the hope of sinicising the barbarians, but the effect of contact seems often to have been the



The crossbowman is a popular theme in Han tomb reliefs. a) Engraving on a bronze bell from Chuchou, Hunan; b) Die-stamped tile, Cheng-chou, Honan; c) From the lintel of the I-nan tomb, 2nd or 3rd century AD.

reverse. The Ch'iang fought on foot and were not well organised, but they appear to have been exceptionally great in number, and by about AD 190 the whole Empire is said to have lived in fear of them.

Elsewhere on the frontiers, the Eastern Han was also unable to maintain the gains of its predecessor. In 106 the Korean kingdom of Koguryo drove out the Chinese garrisons, and although a Han expedition in 132 regained some of the losses, Koguryo was never fully subdued. In 43 General Ma Yuan, aided by a supply fleet sent along the coast, had reoccupied Vietnam, capturing the Trung sisters, who had revolted three years earlier. But the rebellion had dealt Han authority a serious blow, and the war cost them dearly, with half of the troops sent from the north becoming casualties. In the 2nd century problems on other frontiers had their repercussions in the south, as peasants fleeing from the Ch'iang poured into the sparsely populated lands south of the Yangtze, provoking the local tribes to continual revolt. After 137 there was unrest throughout the south, and it spread to the north on the death of Emperor Shun-ti.

About this time there first appeared groups known as *yao* or 'supernatural' rebels – men motivated by millenarian prophecies to establish a new dynasty. The most important of these, the Yellow Turbans, launched a rebellion in 184 which was to play a major role in the downfall of the Han. The court commanded loyal officials to suppress the revolt, but after temporarily defeating the Yellow Turbans, in 185, the officials retained their private armies and began to meddle in politics. When Emperor Ling-ti died, in 189, power fell into the hands of Tung Cho, a warlord allied to the Ch'iang, who first established a puppet emperor and then expelled him from Lo-yang. Loyalist officers formed a coalition which defeated Tung Cho in 191, but it was too late to restore order. Although the Han dynasty persisted officially until 220, the unity of the Empire was at an end.

RECRUITMENT

The army of the Western Han consisted of three main elements: conscripts, convicts and volunteers. Conscription was prescribed for men within an age range which was normally from 23 to 56 but varied according to circumstances. Most spent their first year of service in training and a further year with the armies at the capital or in the provinces, or with the frontier garrisons. Selected former soldiers formed a local militia, the *pen-ming*, available in emergencies. Conscripts served mainly as infantry; cavalry was provided by volunteers from noble families or by non-Chinese auxiliaries.

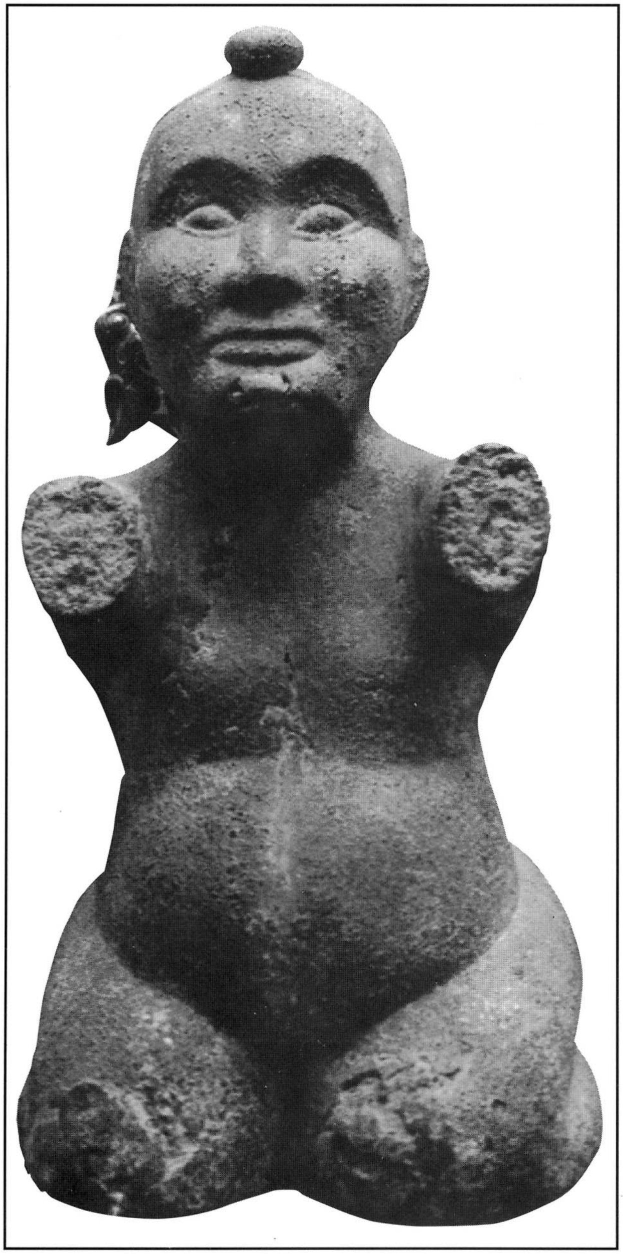
Conscription was extended to both the commanderies and the semi-autonomous kingdoms of the Empire, but probably not to the *shu-kuo* or dependent states, which were formed in frontier regions once local rulers had accepted Han overlordship. The earliest known dependent state was formed from a group of Hsiung-nu in 121 BC, and after 109 BC *shu-kuo* cavalry are frequently referred to in Han armies. It was logical to employ barbarian troopers in the northern steppes, to which their equipment and tactics were already adapted, but the Wu-huan were especially highly regarded, and they were deployed throughout the Empire from the mid-1st century. A similar policy was employed by the Eastern Han with regard to the tribes of the south, where the climate was unhealthy and imposed unacceptable attrition on units recruited in north or central China. The army sent to suppress a revolt in I-chou in AD 48, for example, was mainly drawn from the nearby commandery of Pa.

Various grades of convicts also served with Han armies; most were labour troops, but some apparently did fight, although there is no evidence that they formed a fanatical assault force as they had in some earlier Chinese armies. Standard convict dress was a red robe and iron neck-collar, and their heads were shaved as a symbolic alternative to decapitation.

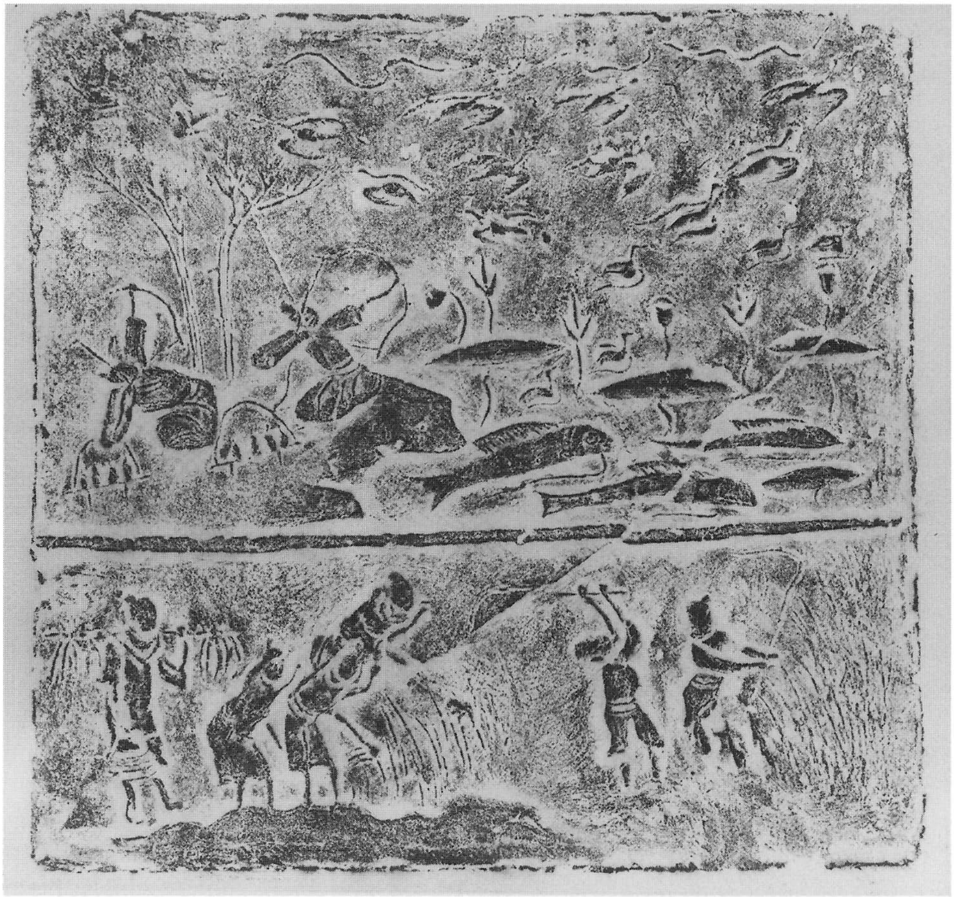
Other sources of troops were exploited on occasion, and although conscription provided the bulk of their manpower, Han forces could be very diverse in origin. A well-known example is provided by an account of an army sent against the Ch'iang in 61 BC, which comprised: serving prisoners; amnestied convicts; conscript infantry; a unit of volunteer marksmen; another unit of orphans whose fathers had died on active service; 'barbarian' cavalry; Chinese cavalry from six western commanderies; and Ch'iang cavalry from one of the dependent states.

The quality of Han armies also varied, as a decree of 90 BC shows: in giving reasons for not undertaking a new campaign in the north-west it cites badly maintained defences, ill-disciplined officers and troops of poor morale. The loss of two armies to the Hsiung-nu in 129 BC was blamed on lack of time to train the newly raised conscripts. Li Kuang-li's armies of 104 and 101 BC were mostly raised from 'young men of bad reputation', and skilled bowmen amnestied from prison for the purpose.

There is little reliable information on the numbers of troops available to the Han, although from population censuses it can be deduced that it must have been in the hundreds of thousands. Huge armies are sometimes mentioned, such as the '50,000 cavalry and several hundred thousand infantry' sent against the Hsiung-nu in 119 BC. However, a comment in the *Han Shu*, to the effect that the troops



Bronze figures of this type depicting southern tribal warriors are often found in Han royal tombs, where they may represent tribute-bearers. (British Museum)



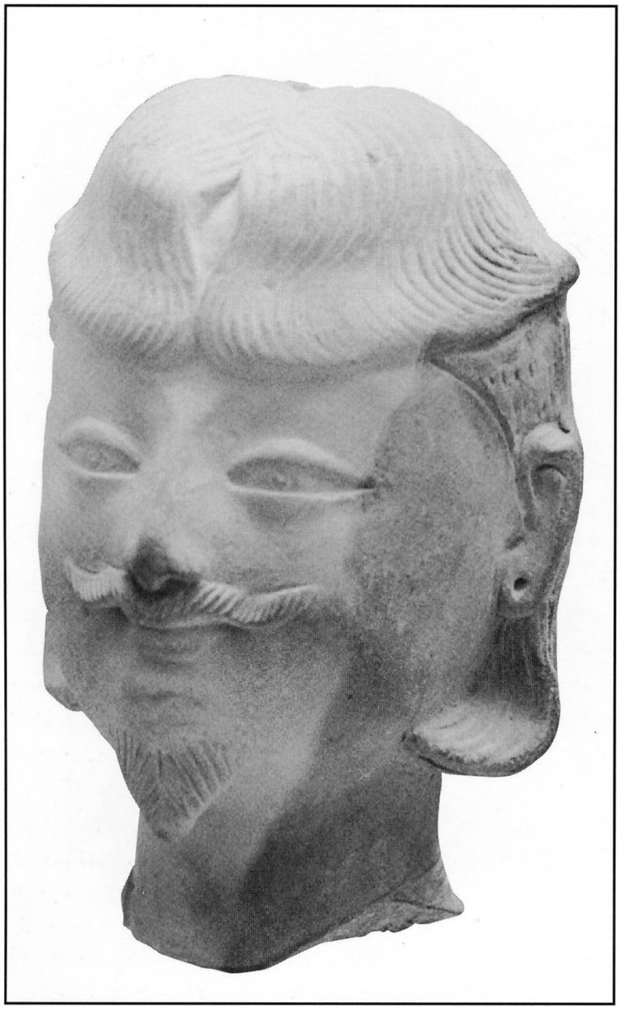
The archers in this duck-hunting scene, on a tile from Szechwan, wear the long robes associated with the Han aristocracy. Below them are peasants wearing the shorter working costume of the common people. (British Museum)

levied for one campaign were 'altogether more than forty thousand and were called a hundred thousand' suggests that large round numbers may often represent nominal unit sizes rather than an exact count.

ORGANISATION

A characteristic of the Han command system was a reluctance to concentrate power in too few hands; an army was often commanded by two generals – 'of the Left' and 'of the Right', or 'of the Front' and 'of the Rear' – whose personal rivalry could be relied upon to prevent collusion against the throne. A field command was usually an *ad hoc* appointment for a specific purpose, often reflected in the title given to the recipient – such as 'General Charged With Crossing the Liao' for a campaign in Korea. Penalties for failure were severe: a defeated general risked execution, as did subordinates who returned after their commander had been killed. Junior officers were tested annually for their skill at archery, and were rewarded according to the number of hits scored on a target.

Records from the north-western garrisons give an outline of unit organisation at lower levels: a *hou kuan* or company usually consisted of five *hou* (platoons), each with several *sui* or sections of an officer and four to ten men. Five-deep deployment seems to have been the norm for infantry. Above the *hou kuan* were the sector headquarters or *tu-wei fu* for garrison troops, and the division or *ying*, under a *chiang-chun* or general, the highest permanent position. *Hsiao-wei*, often translated as 'colonel', was a lower rank used for temporary appointments. Units were distinguished by names, either relating to the place where they were stationed, or honorific or exhortatory, such as *P'o-hu* or 'Smash Foe'. Imperial Guard units existed with titles such as the 'Brave as Tigers' and 'Feathered Forest' cavalry. Although Emperors like Wu-ti practised riding and archery and wore the uniform of the Imperial Guards, after Kao-ti they



Pottery head from Khotan c. 1st century AD. *This may be typical of the appearance of the Tarim Basin peoples over whom the Han and Hsiung-nu frequently fought. (British Museum)*

seldom participated personally in operations.

In the Later Han the system of conscription continued, but gradually permanent standing armies came into existence which enhanced the political power of their commanders. After AD 89 the title of *Ta Chiang-chun* or 'Commander-in-Chief' was a political appointment which carried the responsibilities of a regent. The permanent guard at the capital, Lo-yang, was known as the 'Northern Army' and comprised one unit of Wu-huan and Hsiung-nu horse-archers and four of Chinese, totalling 4,000 men. The 'Army of the Western Garden' was created in AD 188 as a counterweight to the Northern Army, but consisted of little more than the private forces of a collection of warlords.

WEAPONS

The armies which founded the Han were mainly footsoldiers, with a small proportion of cavalry and chariots, and forces within the Empire tended to remain dependent on infantry. However, the campaigns on the Central Asian steppe from the mid-2nd century BC were often carried out by all-cavalry forces. Weapons and armour were similar to those used by the Ch'in (see MAA 218, *Ancient Chinese Armies*). Infantry were often protected with leather or iron lamellar armour. They wore caps or iron helmets, and were equipped with spears or halberds, swords, and bows or crossbows. The crossbow is the most frequently mentioned weapon in the sources, and was often given the credit for the Han army's superiority over its enemies. There were various grades of crossbow of different draw-weight. The heaviest required a pull of over 350 lb to cock them, and were suitable only for static positions, where they could be fixed on revolving mounts. Strong men capable of loading the larger weapons were known as *chueh chang*, and were highly valued specialists. Many accounts testify to the effect of massed crossbow volleys in beating off cavalry attacks. In sieges, and occasionally in the field, missile troops were drawn up behind men carrying spears or shields, but separate deployment seems to have been the norm. Lighter crossbows were also used by Han cavalry, who were prepared to fight dismounted if necessary, and one source implies that both crossbow and halberd could be carried. Some crossbows were very small, and probably intended for one-handed use. (It may have been one of these which Hsiang Yu concealed on his person and used to wound the future Emperor Kao-ti in 203 BC.)

Like the infantry, cavalry also used halberds, spears, swords and bows. The mounted archer is a common theme in Han art, and it is often difficult to tell whether it is a Chinese trooper or a steppe nomad auxiliary who is being depicted. Nomad troops were highly valued for campaigns in the open terrain of the northern frontier, where their horse archery could be devastatingly effective. Ssu-ma Ch'ien describes a skirmish in which three Hsiung-nu eagle hunters, by circling and using their bows from a distance, defeated a party of about 30 Han cavalry, killing most of them.

Bronze knife, Han period. (British Museum)

Some riders wore armour, but horse armour is not attested until the very end of the dynasty. A relief from I-nan, possibly late Han, appears to show two cavalry figures with shields, but this was uncommon, perhaps because weapons such as halberds, bows and crossbows required the use of both hands. The four-horse chariot was still in use under the Western Han, but it disappeared during the 1st century BC.

DEFENCES

The Han inherited from the Ch'in not only the hostility of the Hsiung-nu but the policy of building fortifications to keep the nomads at bay. The 'Great Wall' mentioned in several Han treaties was not necessarily, however, the original Ch'in one. The dynasty temporarily lost the Ordos region – within Shih Huang-ti's wall – to the Hsiung-nu after 200 BC, and had to build new defences further south and eventually extend the line further west into the region of modern Kansu, which had never been occupied by the Ch'in. Wall building was a fairly quick and simple operation – a single man was said to be able to erect 18 feet of rampart per month – and the walls were probably no more than low earth banks, using loose stones or even bundled twigs as a core, which acted more as boundary markers and lookout posts than as serious fortifications. Rectangular brick watchtowers were placed at intervals of slightly less than a mile, and banks of raked sand outside the defences were used to reveal any nocturnal incursions. A system of signalling between the towers by means of red and white flags, smoke or bonfires was in operation by about 160 BC.

GARRISON LIFE

Thanks to the records excavated at Edsin-gol, we know something about conditions in the forts on the northern frontier. Most of the troops were conscripts, but some seem to have been stationed there for many years, perhaps acting as paid surrogates for men who wished to avoid military service. Garrison life was often dull, relieved only by expedients familiar to many later generations of servicemen: training, inspections, and the liberal use of whitewash – of which thirteen coats have been distinguished on one excavated wall. Professional standards were generally high, and supply and medical services very advanced for the time. However, the bureaucracy could be stifling; the sheer bulk of the files which accompanied an army HQ could be inconvenient on the march, especially since until the 2nd century AD they were painted onto wooden strips. Returns had to be made of the most trivial matters, and one surviving inspection report mentions, among other things: 'in two small woodpiles the stacking was not alternated . . . two water storage jars missing . . . wall unswept . . . dogs not kept in kennel . . .'

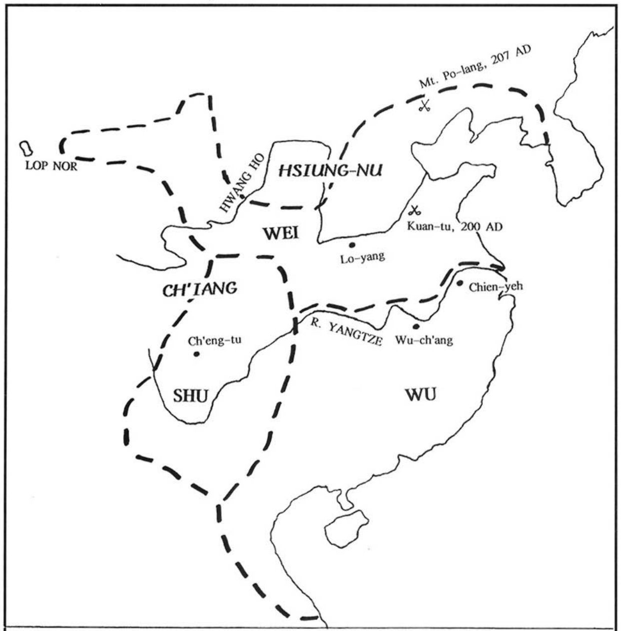
Maps were also important: when the Ch'in dynasty fell, Hsiao Ho braved the chaos of the sack of Hsien-yang to collect all the maps and registries of Ch'in and hand them over to Kao-ti, who was thus 'able to inform himself of all the strategic defence points of the Empire'.

Garrison units were supported by military-agricultural colonies which grew food for the combat troops. The aim was both to push forward the agricultural frontier at the expense of the Hsiung-nu, and to supply the garrisons at no cost to the rest of the Empire. Colonies were established in fertile oases beyond the frontier, to act as supply bases for mobile operations. The first were probably set up in the late 2nd century BC, at Lun-t'ai and Ch'u-li on the southern slopes of the T'ien Shan, but the most important was at Hami, at the eastern end of the Tarim Basin. Hami frequently changed hands between the Han and the Hsiung-nu, but was finally abandoned to the nomads in AD 153.

THE THREE KINGDOMS AND THE TS'IN

AD 189–316

The period which followed the collapse of effective Han authority is generally referred to as the 'Three Kingdoms', after the rival successor states of Wei, Wu and Shu. Largely due to the influence of the later work known as the 'Romance of the Three Kingdoms' it has passed into folklore as an era of chivalry and adventure – a sort of Arthurian age. The reality, however, was rather more sordid.



THE THREE KINGDOMS, c. 220 AD.

The generals who had overthrown Tung Cho soon began quarrelling among themselves. To add to the chaos, the Yellow Turban rebels remained under arms, joined by numerous other bandit groups, until decisively defeated in AD 192 by the most famous of the contending warlords, Ts'ao Ts'ao, who abducted Tung Cho's puppet emperor, Liu Hsieh. The Korean commanderies came under the control of the Marquis of Liaotung, who attempted to invade China and restore Han authority but was beaten off by another warlord, Yuan Shao. In 200 Ts'ao, his armies strengthened by surrendered rebels and barbarian auxiliaries, including many Hsiung-nu, crushed Yuan in turn, but failed to reunify the Empire. Ts'ao's attempt to take Szechwan was thwarted in 208 at the Battle of the Red Cliffs, and Liu Pei, a member of the Han imperial family, set up the independent state of Shu – often known as Shu Han – in the south-west.

On Ts'ao's death in 220, his son Ts'ao P'ei deposed the figurehead emperor and founded the Wei dynasty; Liu Pei riposted by proclaiming himself the rightful Han emperor. Meanwhile Wu, in the south-east, also declared itself independent under Sun Ch'uan.

Wei in the north was by far the most powerful of the Three Kingdoms, with roughly 60 per cent of the total population, but the task which faced it was formidable. Wu was able to shelter behind a series of river obstacles and its marshy and semi-tropical terrain was unsuitable for the northern cavalry. Its ally, Shu, was efficiently organised under its chief minister Chu-ko Liang (AD 181–234) – next to Ts'ao Ts'ao probably the most famous figure of the age. Shu even managed to bring some of the tribes further to the south under intermittent control, but in the long term could not overcome the Wei superiority in manpower. In 263 three Wei armies, allegedly totalling 180,000 men, converged on the Shu capital, Ch'eng-tu. Driven back from the frontiers, the Shu forces, under Chiang Wei, held a line of mountain passes and blocked the advance of the enemy main body, but in an epic march through supposedly impassable terrain the Wei general, Teng Ai, crossed the mountains undetected, defeated the Shu reserve army in two battles, and captured Ch'eng-tu. Chiang Wei was undefeated, but decided to surrender.

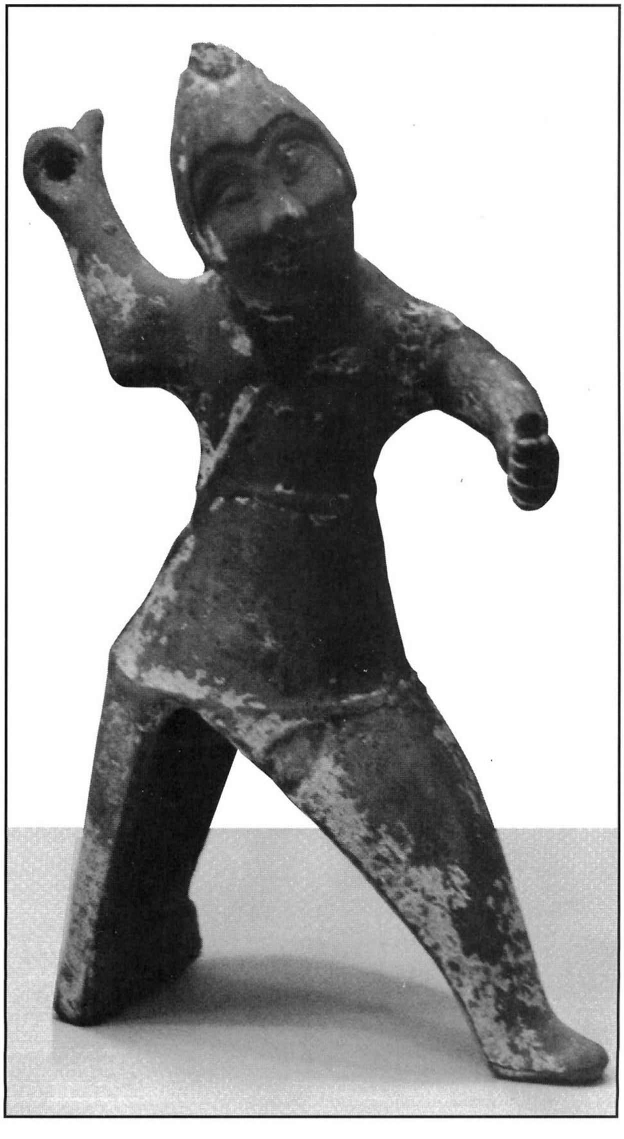
Two years later the Wei dynasty was replaced in a coup d'état by the Ts'in (founded by Ssu–ma Yen), which continued the struggle against the south-eastern state. Wu was finally conquered in AD 280 and the Empire was once again united, but the Ts'in regime – known to later historians as the Western Ts'in to distinguish it from its successor based in the south-east – was built on shaky foundations. Its northern power-base, ravaged by war, was not as prosperous as it had been, and the army was under the control of a group of wealthy and powerful imperial princes whom Ssu-ma Yen had placed in command of large numbers of troops in an attempt to offset the risk of another officer seizing power as he had done. An ill-advised demobilisation after the fall of Wu antagonised the princes and added to the disorder caused by bands of unemployed ex-soldiers, some of whom sold their weapons to the Hsien-pi or Hsiung-nu. After Ssu-ma's death in 290, open civil war broke out among the members of his family.

The beginning of the end for the Western Ts'in came with this period of internecine fighting, known as the 'Troubles of the Eight Princes' (AD 291–306). The non-Chinese groups which had been settled in the north and west since late Han times – Hsiung-nu, Hsien-pi, Chieh, Ch'iang, Ti and related peoples – saw their opportunity and began to move east into the Yellow River plain, setting up independent states within the Empire. At this point the old Han practice of marrying imperial princesses to Hsiung-nu leaders came home to haunt the Chinese. A Hsiung-nu chief – a descendant of one of these princesses – adopted the Chinese name of Liu Yuan and announced his claim to be the rightful heir to the Han empire. In 311 an army under his son, Liu Ts'ung, sacked the Ts'in capital at Lo-yang, and in 316 Ch'ang-an also fell, marking the formal end of the Western Ts'in. A successor state, the Eastern Ts'in, was set up south of the Huai River, but north China was effectively abandoned to the barbarians.

Military Developments of the Three Kingdoms Period

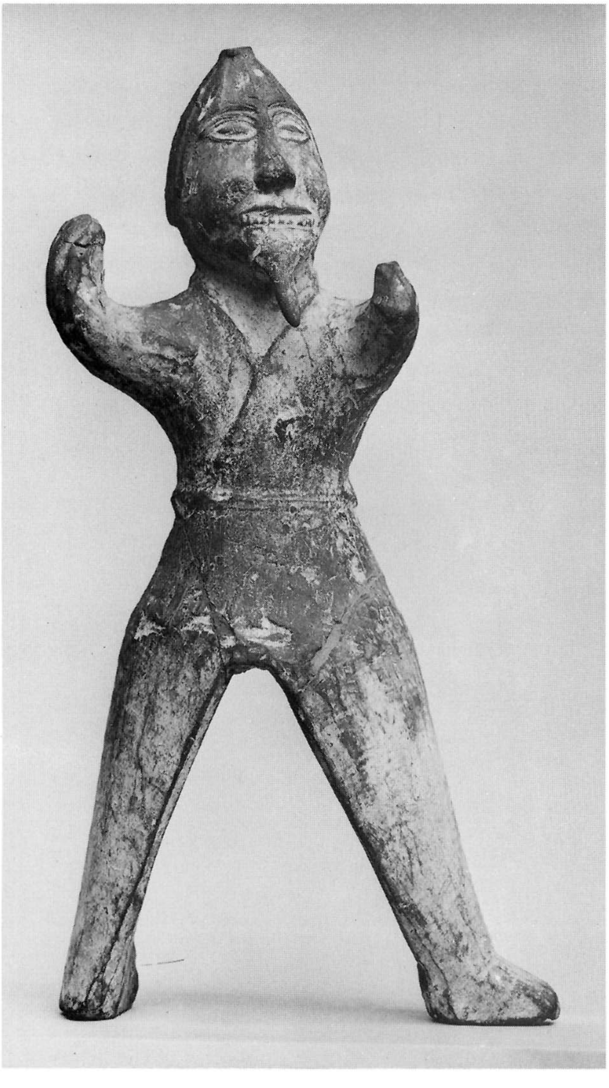
The Three Kingdoms era is traditionally seen as one of the high points of the art of war in China, and many of the examples of successful stratagems found in later books and commentaries feature the exploits of men like Ts'ao Ts'ao, Chu-ko Liang and Teng Ai. In army organisation and tactics, however, there was much continuity with the Han. Many of the generals who rose to power following Tung Cho's coup relied heavily on non-Chinese auxiliaries; the core of Yuan Shao's army, for example, was provided by Wu-huan allies.

In general, shock cavalry seems to have been increasingly emphasised, especially in Wei, although the proportion and numbers of horsemen mentioned suggest a decline in the overall numbers available with the loss of Chinese control over the extreme north-west.



These pottery figures showing spear-throwers have been found at various 3rd- and 4th-century sites in north-west China. This one is dated to c. AD 300 and may represent a Ch'iang tribesman. (Victoria and Albert Museum)

Weapons were mainly lances and bows, although the relative proportions of each are not known. Horse-archery was not restricted to the nomad-influenced armies of the north; Shu Han had a 'Flying Army' of mounted bowmen, and a king of Wu in AD 258 is described as carrying a bow on horseback. One tomb painting shows a Wei or Ts'in period rider with both lance and bow, but this was probably not usual. Many cavalrymen wore armour, as did a minority of horses. The earliest reference to horse armour seems to date from AD 188, but the first archaeological evidence is a tomb model of 302, showing a simple chest protector of what seems to be quilted material (see Plate E). The ten sets of horse armour owned by Ts'ao Ts'ao, the *ma-k'ai i-ling* mentioned in a memorial of 226, and the armour of the horses captured from Wu in 251, may therefore have been no more than partial frontal barding. Ts'ao Ts'ao's forces were initially very short of armour, but battle accounts imply that it was in widespread use for both cavalry and infantry.



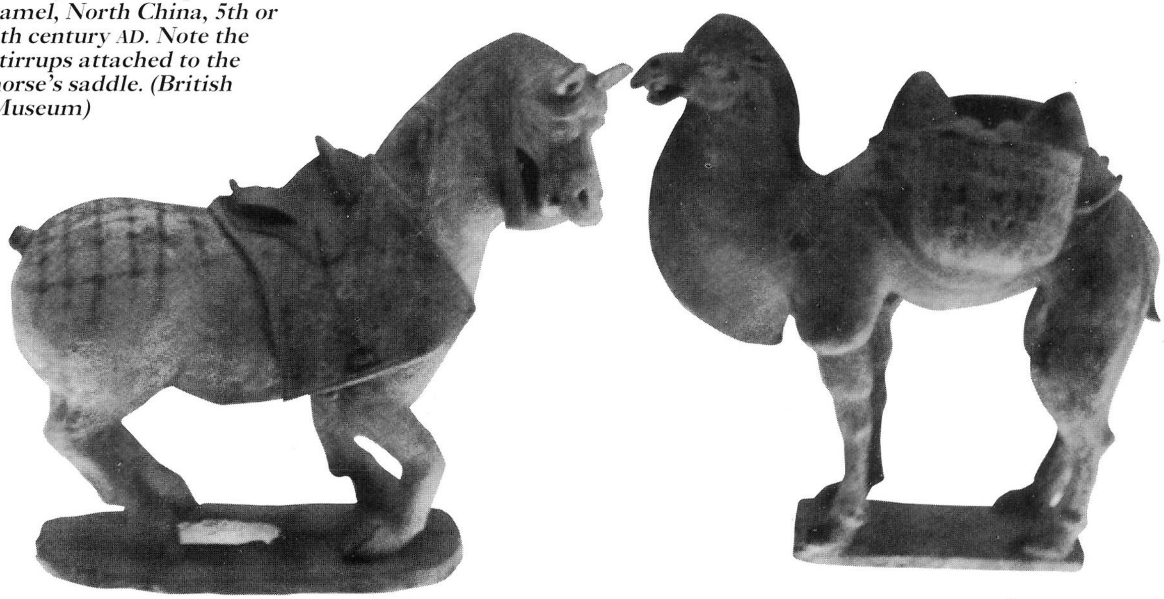
This figure represents a horseman, and may give an idea of the appearance of the Ch'iang cavalry who fought for the Han and later overran the north-west. (British Museum)

Native infantry were armed much as they had been in Han times, although a series of tomb figurines which appear to be throwing spears suggests that this practice – uncommon among Chinese troops – was adopted by some in this period. They may be foreign auxiliaries such as the Ch'iang, who are described as fighting on foot with bows, spears and swords, and as scattering easily, which implies skirmishing tactics.

Specially picked units of 'dare-to-die' shock troops were common, and the ancient tactic of making infantry discard their long weapons and charge with swords and shields alone was still in use. At a battle between Wei and Wu in 253 the Wu commander even made his men remove their armour to storm a position on top of a dam, presumably because the weight might have slowed them down when climbing the slope. The Wei soldiers laughed at this, but were routed by the Wu swordsmen.

Most footsoldiers, however, were probably archers or crossbowmen, and battle accounts describe their missiles as 'falling like rain'. Although deployed in separate units, crossbowmen and close-combat troops could be used in mutual support. Yuan Shao, for example, defeated enemy cavalry with a formation consisting of 800 infantry with shields, flanked on each side by crossbows.

The use of field defences such as wagon laagers, earth ramparts or lines of felled trees became very widespread, and many battles took the form of assaults on fortified lines or camps. The most extreme example was probably a dummy 'wall' of rush matting erected by Wu along the Yangtze to deter a Wei crossing. Siege equipment mentioned by Ssu-ma Kuang includes artillery, movable towers and artificial mounds erected to enable besiegers to shoot over city walls, and scaling ladders. Walls were still constructed of rammed earth and were often damaged by heavy rain. Naval operations were also



Pottery horse and pack camel, North China, 5th or 6th century AD. Note the stirrups attached to the horse's saddle. (British Museum)

common on the rivers, especially the Yangtze, which formed the main Wu line of defence.

The Wei state established by Ts'ao Ts'ao was well organised, and supported large regular forces, possibly as many as 400,000. Ts'ao kept the army under central control, permitting his relatives to retain only small bodyguard units. Food production was a major problem after the damage done to agriculture in the civil wars, so he set up families of colonies which grew crops and stored up supplies in time of peace and provided manpower in time of war. Allied cavalry was recruited from the Hsiung-nu, Hsien-pi and Wu-huan, many of whom were settled within Wei territory. There were also guard units, notably the 'Tiger Cavalry', employed as Ts'ao Ts'ao's personal bodyguard. The Ts'in inherited the Wei system after AD 265, until Ssu-ma Yen deliberately abandoned the centralised system of command and placed members of his family in control of private armies.

The armies of Wei's southern rivals, Wu and Shu, were similarly equipped in most respects, but they did not have access to mounted nomad allies and the southern tribes were too unruly to be a reliable source of recruits. Shu armies did employ some Ch'iang and Ti tribesmen, however. Until his death in 234, Shu was effectively controlled by Chu-ko Liang, who is famous for solving the problem of supplying his troops in the mountains of the south-west by substituting wheelbarrows for the usual ox wagons. The survival of Shu, with perhaps a quarter of the manpower of Wei, has often been ascribed mainly to Chu-ko's efficiency at organising the state for war.

THE BARBARIAN INVASIONS

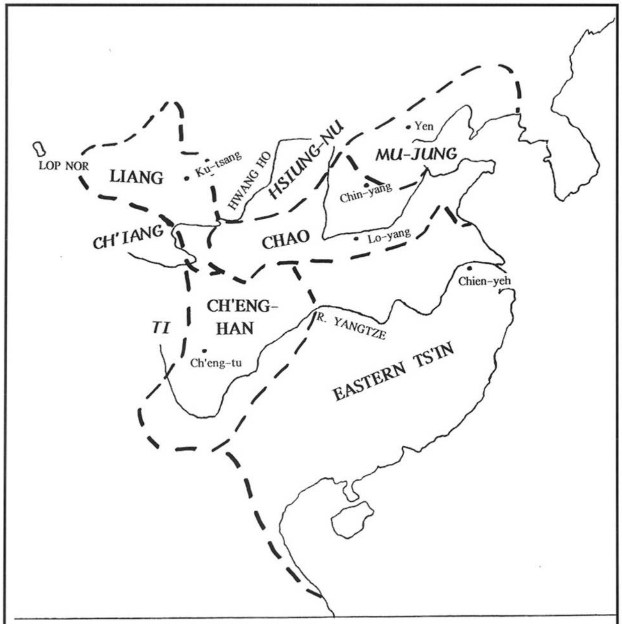
AD 316–589

For the next hundred years after the fall of Ch'ang-an, a bewildering succession of local warlords rose and fell in the north. These regimes are generally classified according to the nationality of the rulers, but in reality most of their armies were an unstable mixture of various races, usually with a core of nomad cavalry but often including many Chinese infantry. They based their power to varying degrees on the local agricultural population, generally employed Chinese noblemen as officials and adopted Chinese-style dynastic names. None of these regimes – not even those few, like the Former Liang (AD 317–

376) and the Northern Yen (AD 407–436), which briefly flourished under native leaders – were established on any firmer basis than naked force, and few long outlasted the warlords who founded them. The Former Chao, established at Ch'ang-an by the Hsiung-nu, survived until AD 329, when it was replaced by the Later Chao, of the rival Chieh tribe. The Chieh were themselves overthrown in 351 by one of their Chinese generals, but the power vacuum thus created did not lead to a native reconquest. The Mu-jung clan of the Hsien-pi, moving in from Manchuria, occupied the north-east from Shansi to Shantung and set up the Former Yen state, which in its turn fell in 370 to the Former Ch'in.

Led by a general of Ti origin, Fu Chien, the Former Ch'in dynasty succeeded in unifying north China between AD 350 and 376, and in 383 attempted to invade the south. Defeated by the Eastern Ts'in at the Fei River, Fu Chien lost the respect of his warriors and his empire collapsed. The north remained in chaos and the native Chinese, their lands ravaged by incessant warfare, fled south in increasing numbers or turned to the consolations of Buddhism.

Eventually, by about AD 430, a regime arose which succeeded in harnessing the abilities of both the barbarian horsemen and the Chinese farmers and administrators. Originating in Mongolia, the Toba were a branch of the Hsien-pi based at P'ing-ch'eng in northern Shansi. By 439 they had reunified north China under a dynasty known as the Northern (or Toba) Wei, and by an intelligent policy of sinification managed to promote a measure of long-term stability, although fruitless attempts to conquer the south continued until 516.



THE COLLAPSE OF THE EMPIRE: CHINA c. 320 AD.

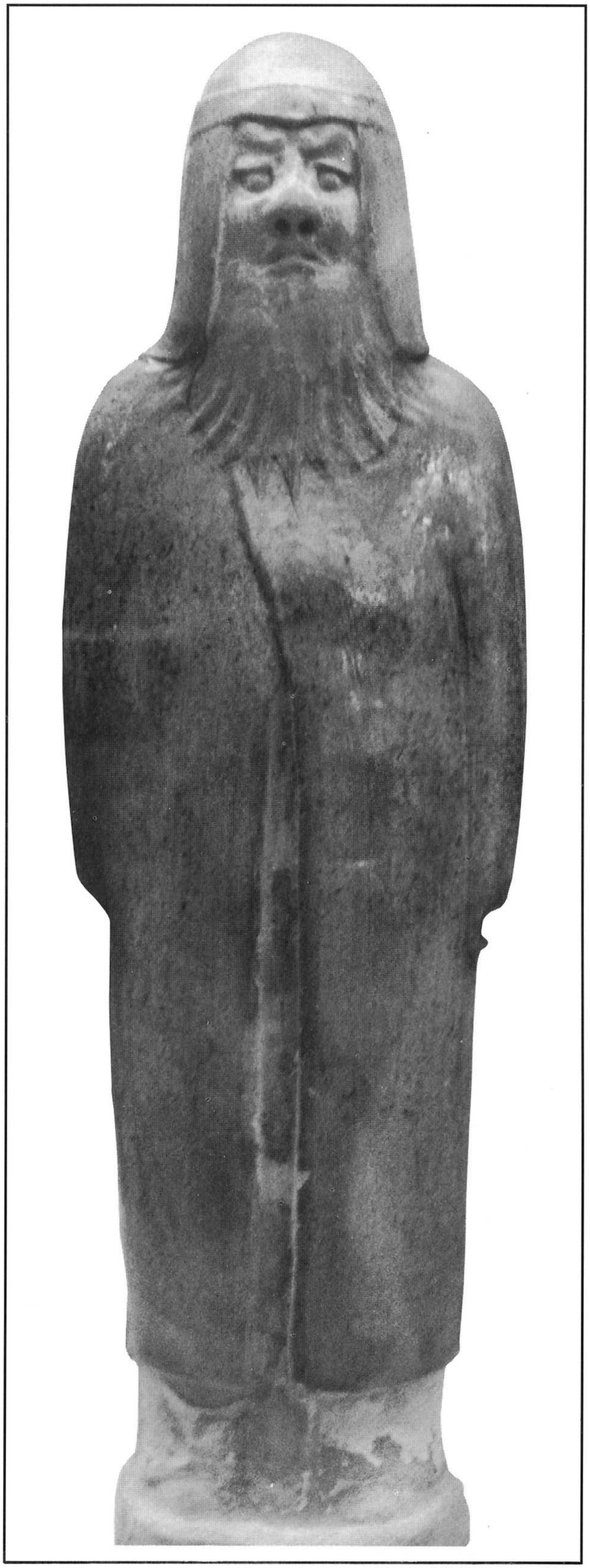
In 493 the Wei emperor, Hsiao-wen-ti, moved south to Lo-yang, where the ruined capital of the Ts'in was rebuilt. On the Mongolian steppes at the beginning of the 5th century new powers had arisen – the Juan-juan and a Turkish tribe, the Kao-ch'e – and the Toba were obliged to take on the role of a traditional Chinese dynasty, sending expeditions into the steppes to counter nomad attacks. In 429 they inflicted a major defeat on the Juan-juan, advancing as far as the T'ien Shan and bringing back hundreds of thousands of captives. Eventually, however, the Wei became overstretched by the demands of both northern and southern fronts, and by the 6th century had resorted to strengthening the northern frontier with six great fortresses built along the edge of the steppe. These were carefully sited to deny water and grazing to nomad armies exhausted after the crossing of the Gobi Desert. One minister even proposed building a huge wall like that of the Ch'in, which had long since fallen into disrepair, but the proposal was not implemented.

Other barbarian regimes also adopted Chinese fortification methods, though not always profitably. The Hsiung-nu of Hsia in the far north-west bankrupted themselves to build a great triple system of defences for their capital, Tung-wan, which nevertheless fell easily to the Toba 14 years later.

Much of the prosperity of the north was restored under the Northern Wei regime, but tensions between the new sinicised elite and the traditionalist Toba garrisons of the frontier led to the 'Revolt of the Six Garrisons' in 523, which severely destabilised the state.

In 534 the Wei split into two mutually hostile polities: the Eastern Wei, under Kao Huan, a former garrison commander, and the smaller and more traditionalist Western Wei, under the able minister Yu-wen T'ai, based at Ch'ang-an. A series of wars led to the defeat of the Easterners – an outcome attributed to the more efficient organisation of the western state and the high social status of its army. In the 550s internal coups replaced the Eastern and Western Wei with the Northern Ch'i and Northern Chou respectively, but hostilities continued. Northern Ch'i, which controlled the fertile Yellow River valley, was far richer than its rival, but seems to have placed little emphasis on military readiness and to have supported an inordinate number of Buddhist monks and nuns. It adopted a defensive policy towards the northern tribes, building over 1,000 miles of walls between AD 550 and AD 556. The Northern Chou, on the other hand, ruthlessly confiscated church property and imposed taxes on the monks in order to fund a mobile army. They also recruited large numbers of Chinese to supplement their Hsien-pi troops. In AD 577 they eliminated the Northern Ch'i and once again brought north China under the control of a single power, and one more reliant on its native subjects than any previous barbarian regime.

During this period it was fashionable in the north to mock the Chinese of the south as unmilitary rustics who 'rode facing backwards on water-buffaloes' and depended mainly on rivers and other natural obstacles for their defence. Yu-wen T'ai referred scathingly to 'the southerner, the aged Hsiao Yen [emperor of the Liang, AD 502–549], who concerns himself solely with ritually approved clothes and caps, with rites and liturgical music'. It is true that the southern elite was less militarised than the barbarian aristocracy of the north, but the natives were by no means always passive victims. On occasion they did undertake offensive operations, and considering that the population of the north outnumbered them by about six to one, they achieved some creditable feats. The Eastern Ts'in recaptured Szechwan from the Ti in 347 and made several attempts to conquer the north between 351 and 365, but the state was weak because of the internal divisions which plagued it – between the original Chinese settlers and the recent immigrants from the north, between various aristocratic clans vying for power at court, and between the regime and the peasant societies (successors to the Yellow Turbans), which instigated several major uprisings. The most significant of these was the revolt of Sun En, who from 399 to 403 occupied an island off the east



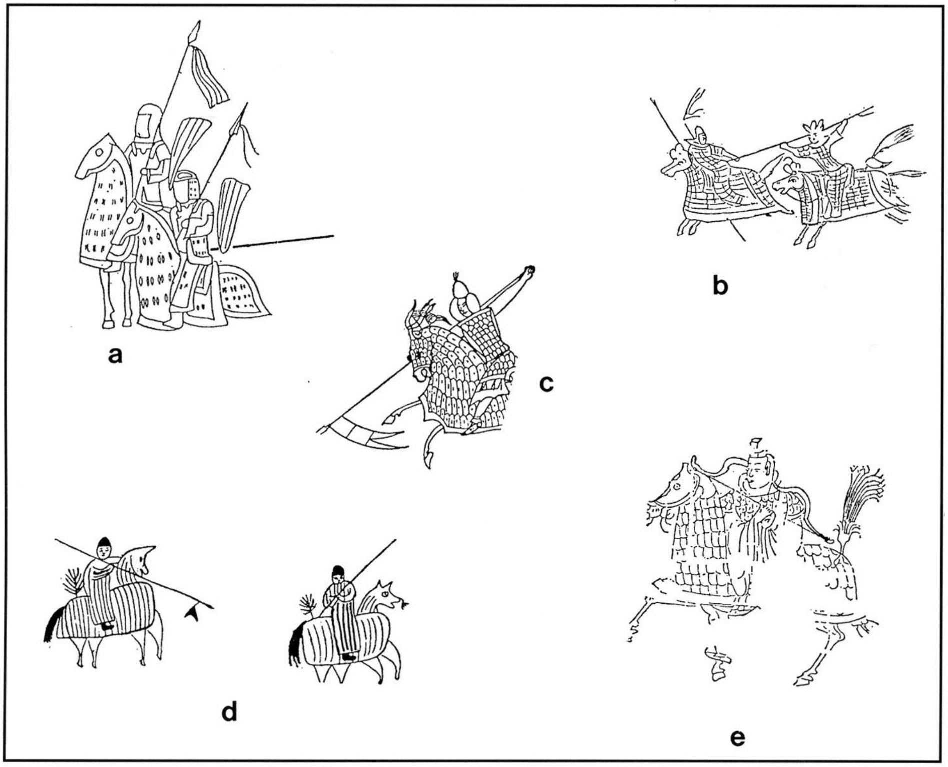
Guardian figures from north Chinese tombs of the 6th century often have non-Chinese features, like the full beard and large nose of this man. (British Museum) coast and launched shipborne raids up the Yangtze, allegedly with up to 100,000 men.

Early in the 5th century, however, with the Toba preoccupied by the Juan-juan in the north, the southerners undertook an ambitious offensive under Liu Yu. In 410 the Southern Yen of Shantung, a Hsien-pi state, was conquered, and between 415 and 417 Liu invaded the north-west and destroyed the Later Ch'in based at Ch'ang-an.

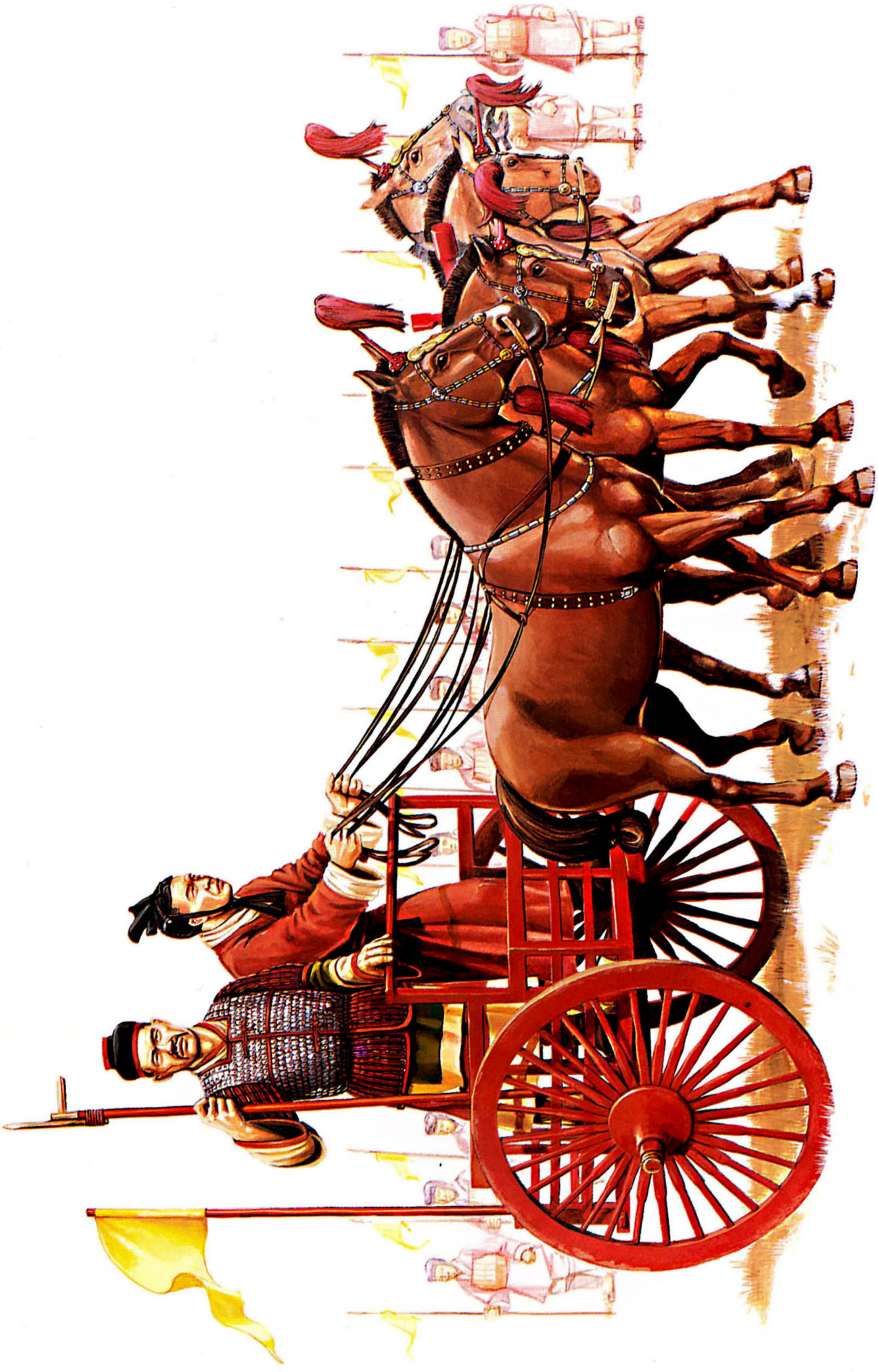
In 420 Liu overthrew the Ts'in and established his own dynasty, the Liu-Sung, which ruled successfully for 50 years but in 479 met the same fate as its predecessor at the hands of another general, Hsiao Tao-ch'eng. His Southern Ch'i was replaced in 502 by the Liang. This continual infighting prevented any further serious attempts to wrest the north from the Toba, but the Ch'i and Liang continued to be successful in repelling all attacks.

In 529, with the Wei distracted by civil war, a southern expeditionary force of 7,000 men, under Ch'en Ch'ing-chih, against great odds won several victories and briefly occupied Lo-yang. This bold stroke was not followed up, however, and the Liang puppet ruler was quickly driven out. In 548 the Liang invited a disaffected Wei general, Hou Ching, to bring his army south, but this resulted in disaster when Hou besieged the Liang capital at Chien-k'ang and sacked it. In 552 a Liang prince in Szechwan tried to secede, but instead fell under the control of the Western Wei. The south was permanently weakened, and the Liang state was split into a Toba puppet regime – the Later Liang – on the middle Yangtze, and the independent Ch'en state downstream. Foolishly, Ch'en joined Northern Chou in its final campaign against Northern Ch'i, taking as its reward the territory north of the Yangtze as far as the River Huai, but in 577 the Chou drove the Ch'en armies out again, inflicting on them an irreversible defeat.

By 580 the Northern Chou dynasty was supreme in the north, and in the south only Ch'en remained a rival. Despite the troubles of the previous three centuries, the resources of north China – with about 85 per cent of the total population – still far outweighed those of the south, and when in 581 a half-Chinese officer, Yang Chien, seized power in Northern Chou after a brief civil war, he found most of the work of reunification already done. Styling himself the first emperor of the Sui dynasty, he organised a massive logistical operation to overwhelm Ch'en.

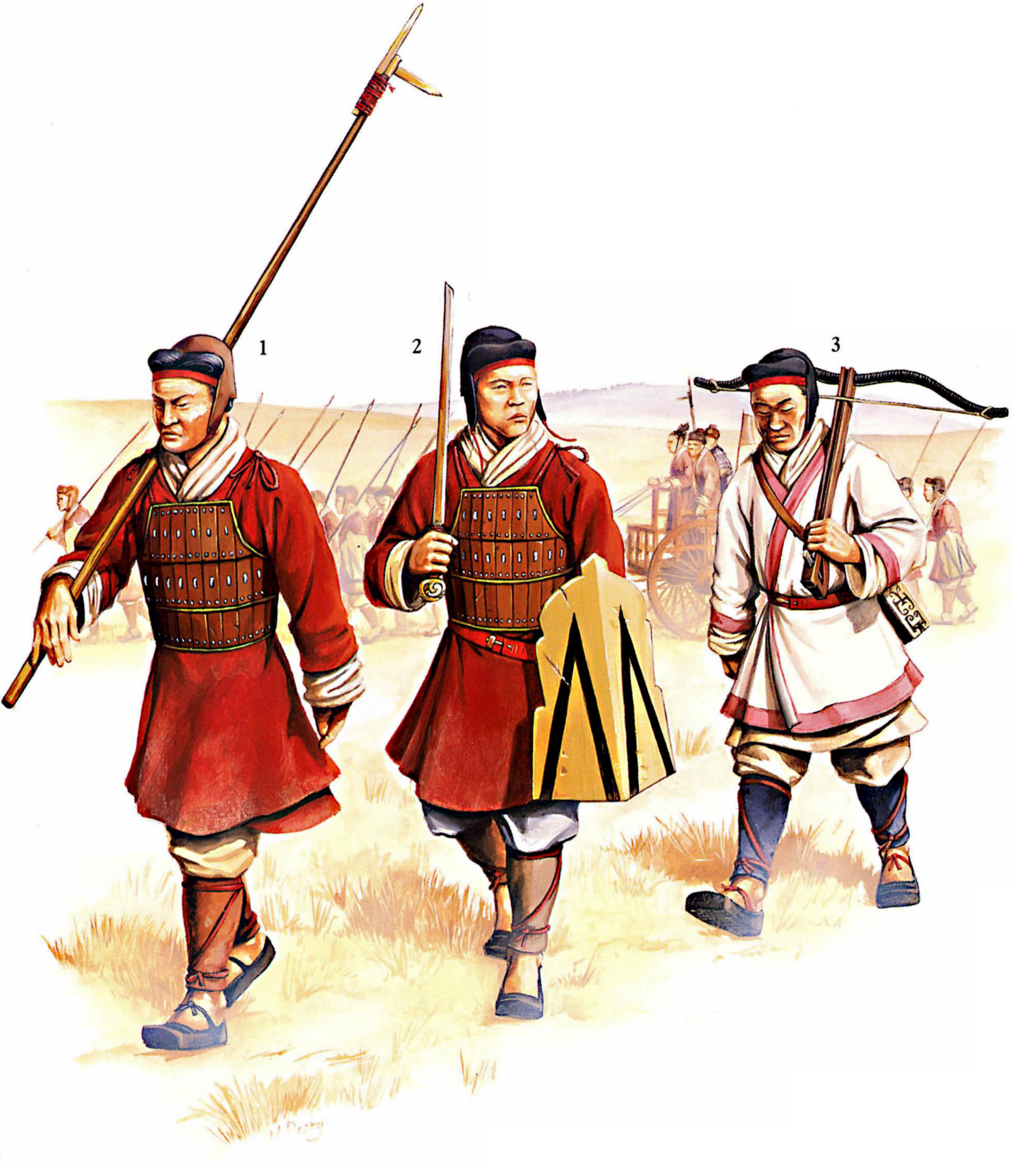


Cataphract cavalry from tomb-paintings: a) From Mai-chi-shan, north-west China, early 6th century; b) T'ung-kou, Korea, 5th century; c) Tun-huang, c. AD 500; d) Chao-t'ung-hou-hai-tzu, Yunnan, AD 385–394; e) Tan-yang, near Kiangsu, south China, late 5th century.



Han chariot

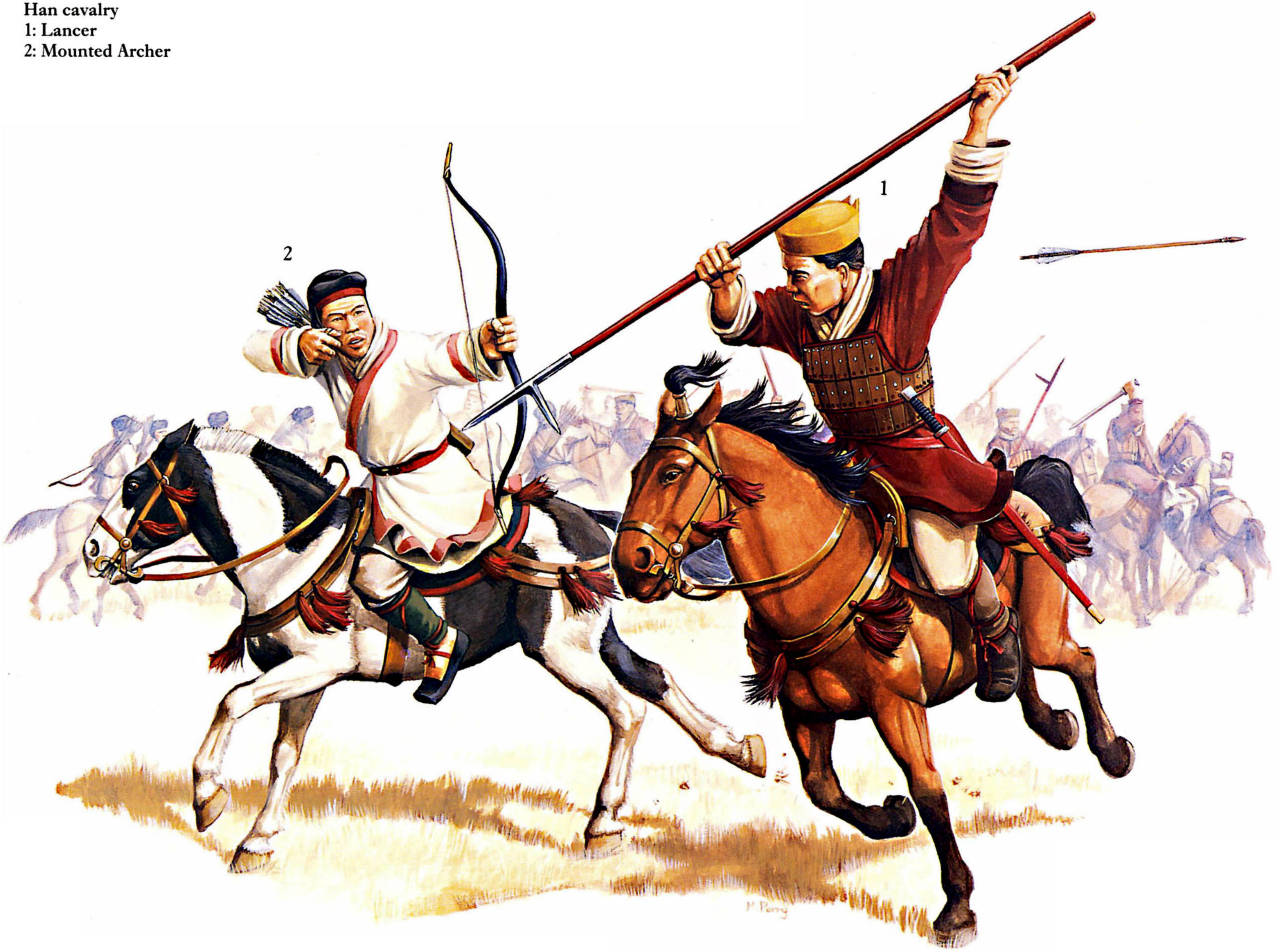
A



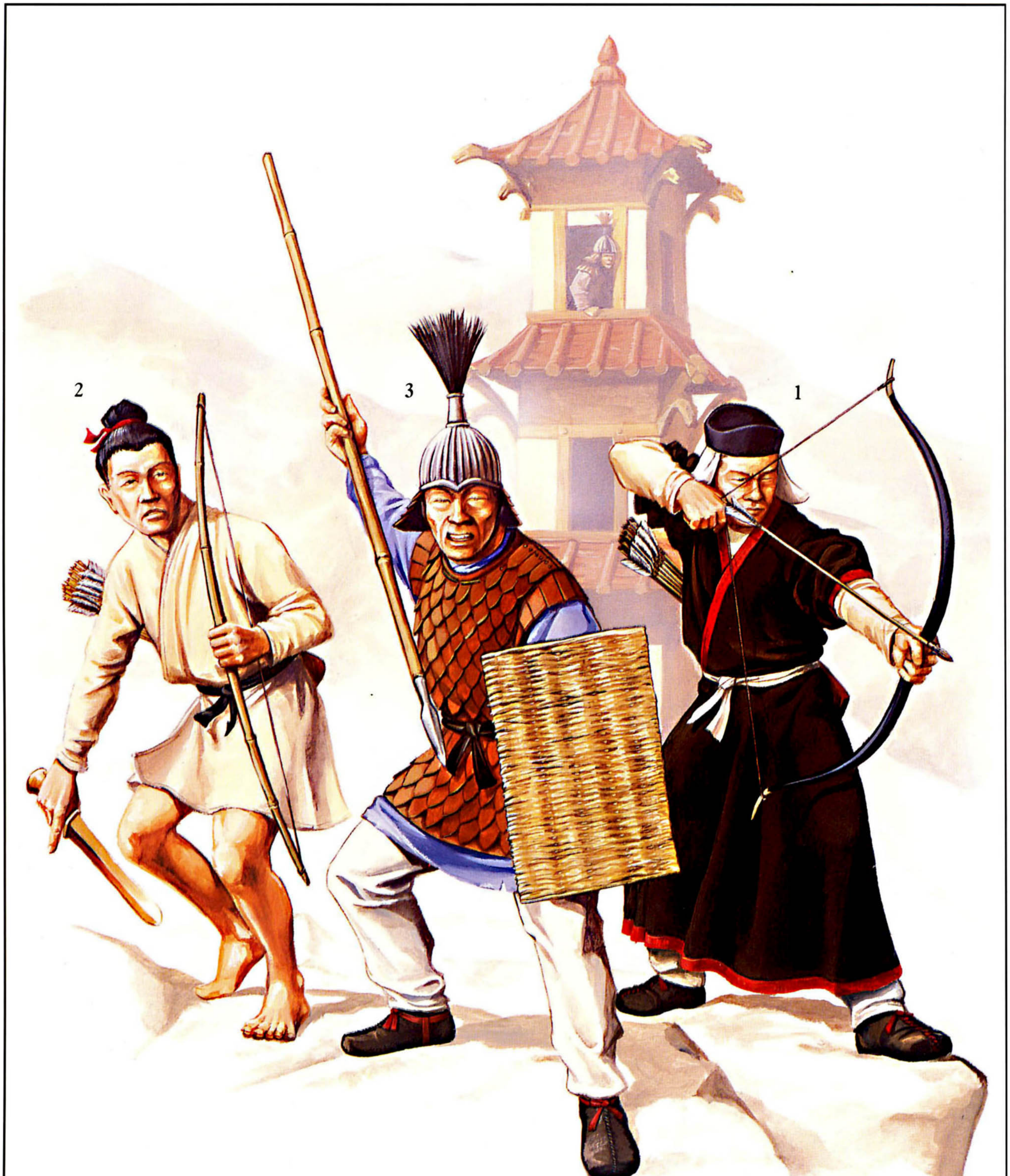
Infantry of the Western Han
1: Spearman
2: Swordsman
3: Crossbowman

B

Han cavalry
1: Lancer
2: Mounted Archer



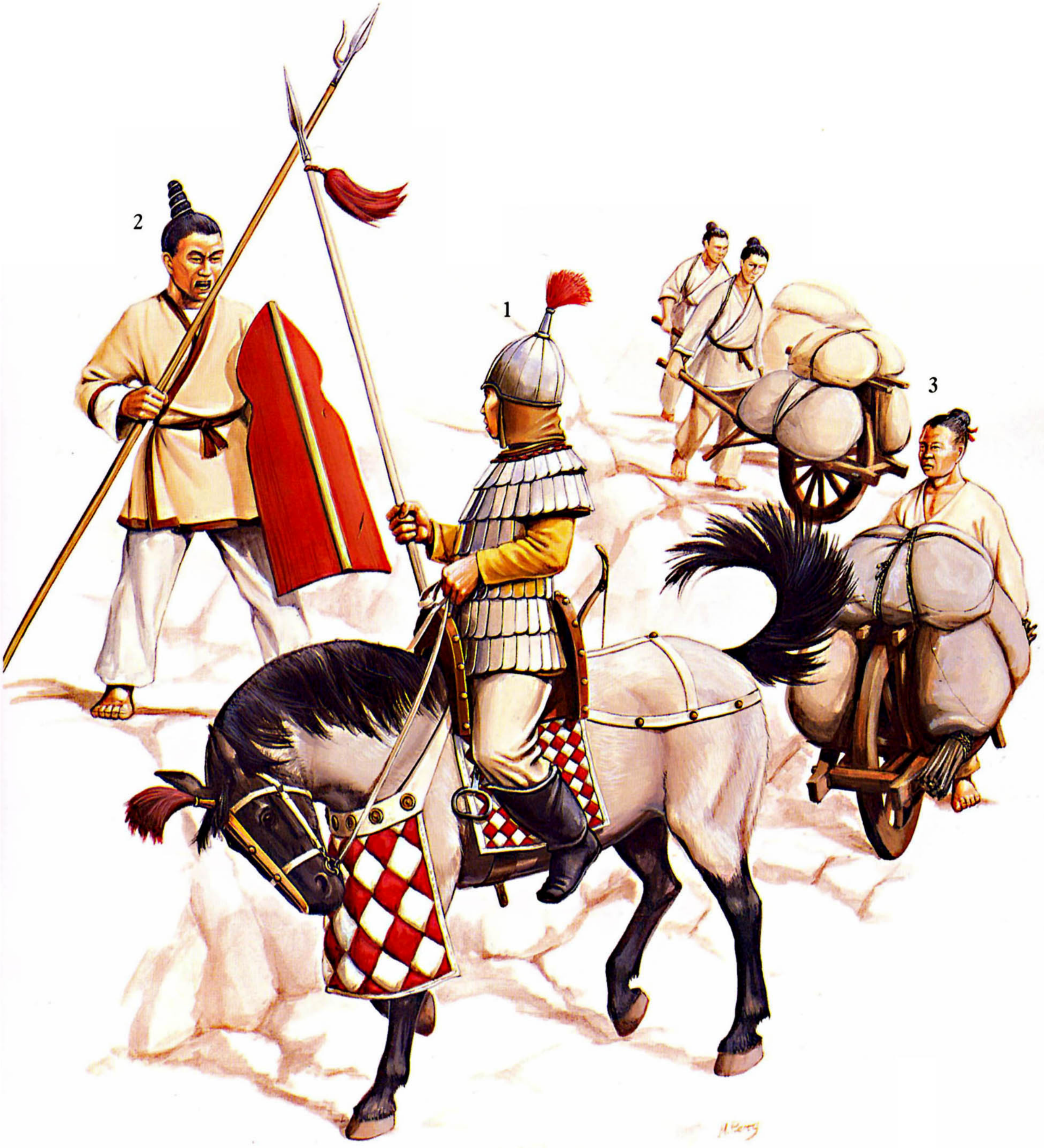
C



Infantry of the Eastern Han
1: Archer
2: Vietnamese auxiliary
3: Late Han or Ts'in armoured infantryman

D

The Three Kingdoms
1: Armoured cavalryman
2: North-western rebel
3: Wheelbarrow



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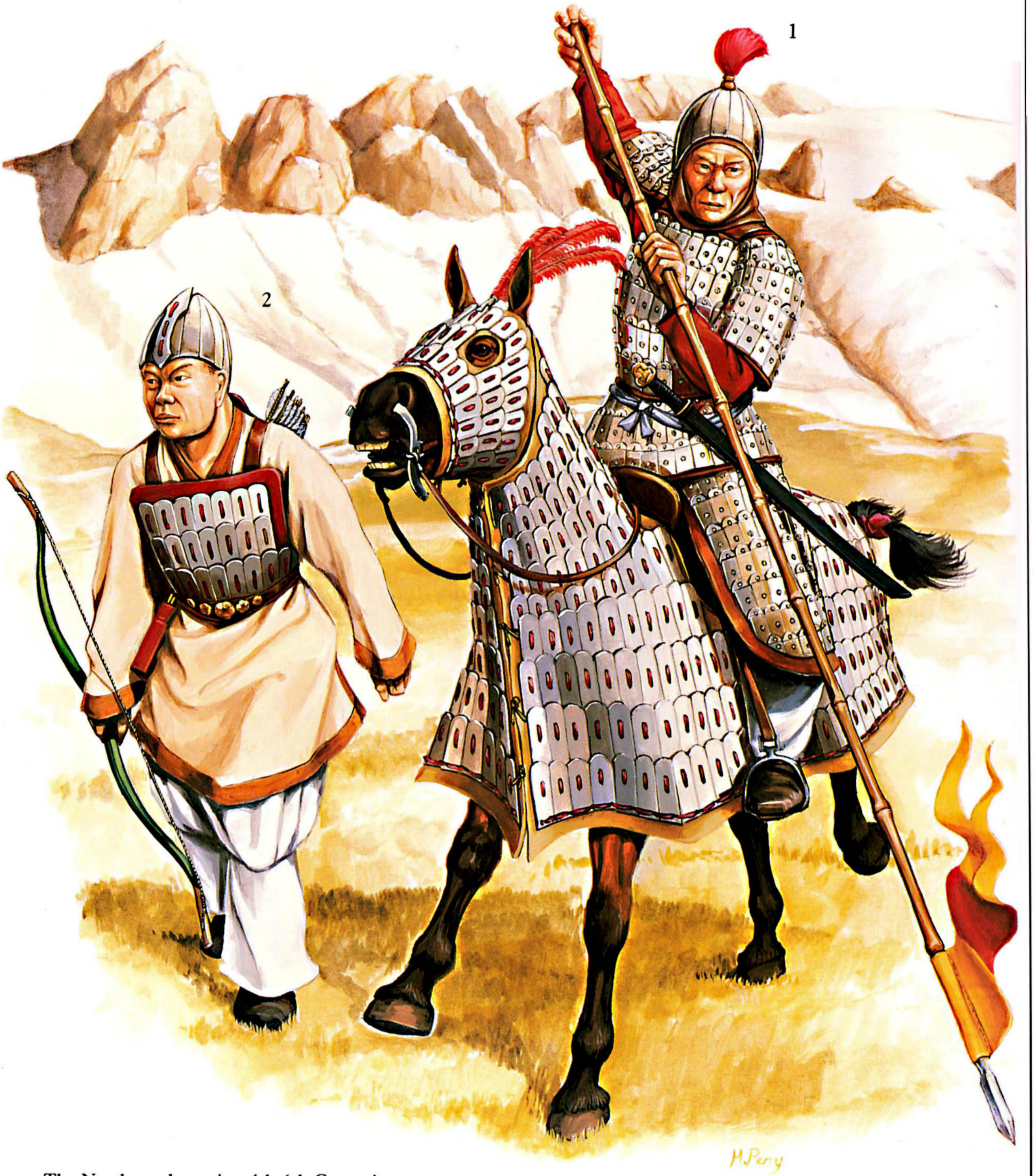
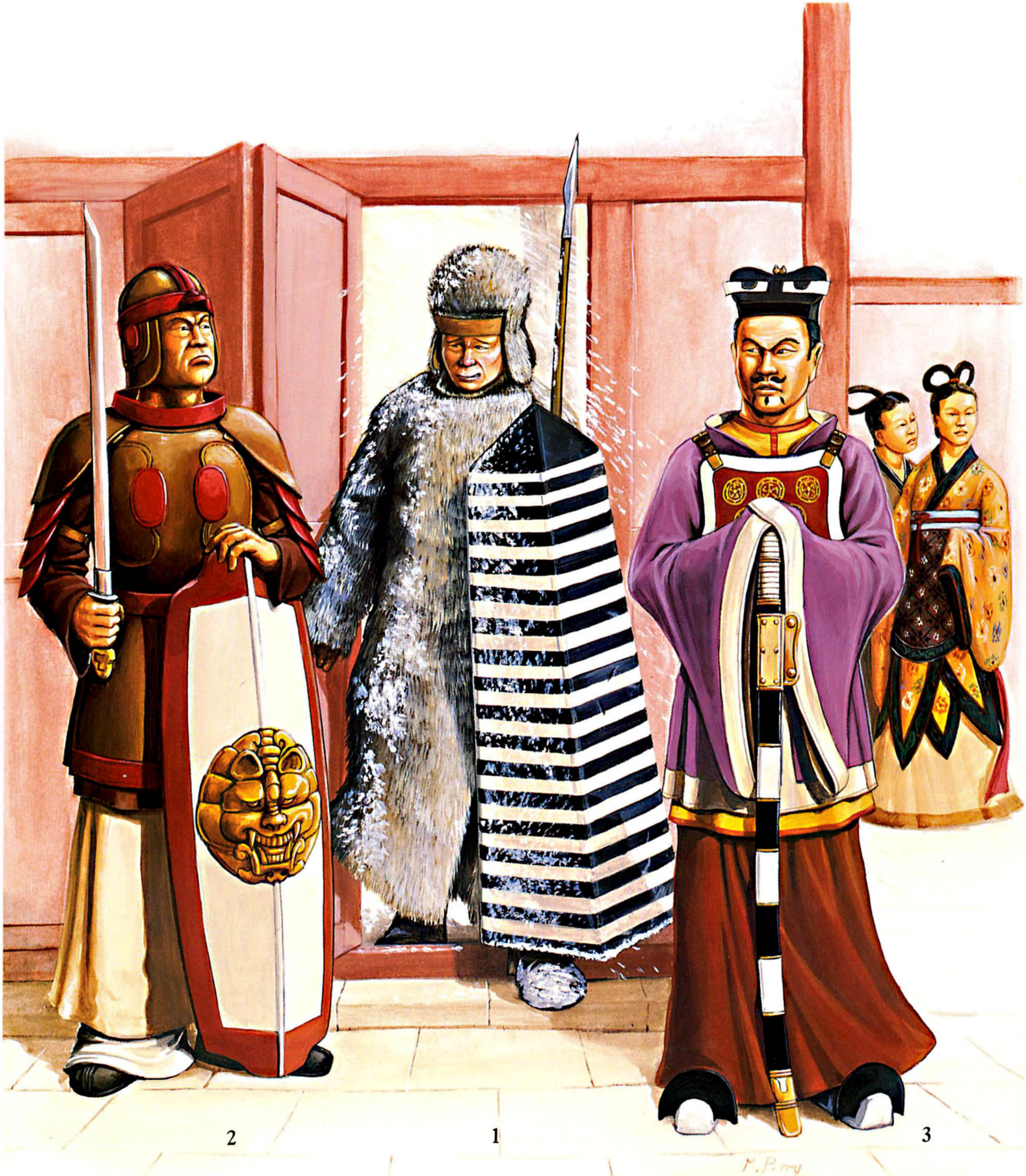


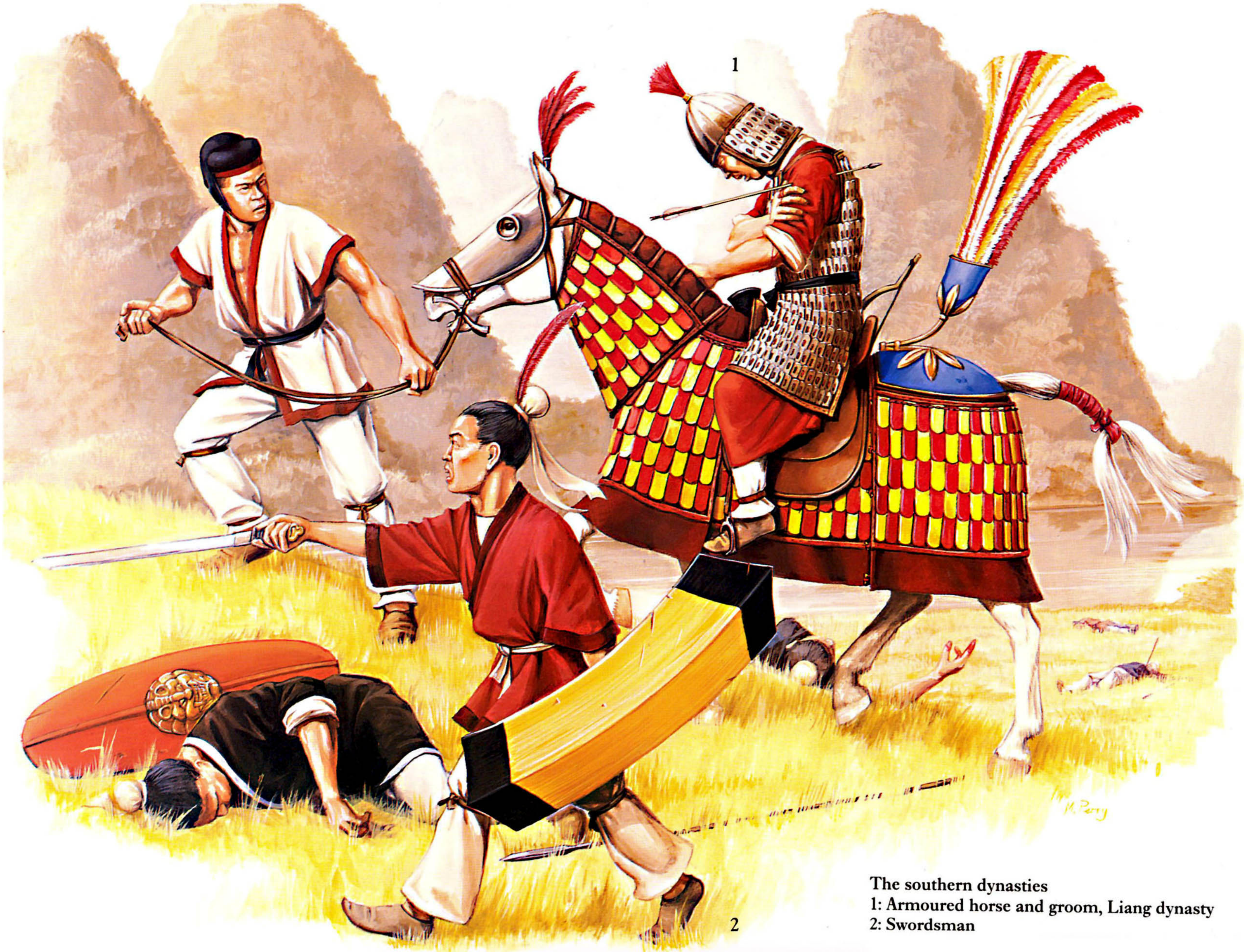
The Northern dynasties, 4th-6th Centuries
1: Cataphract cavalryman
2: Armoured Archer

F



Infantry of the northern dynasties
1: Frontier guard, Northern Wei
2: Armoured infantryman, Northern Ch'i
3: Sui guardsman

H



The southern dynasties
1: Armoured horse and groom, Liang dynasty
2: Swordsman

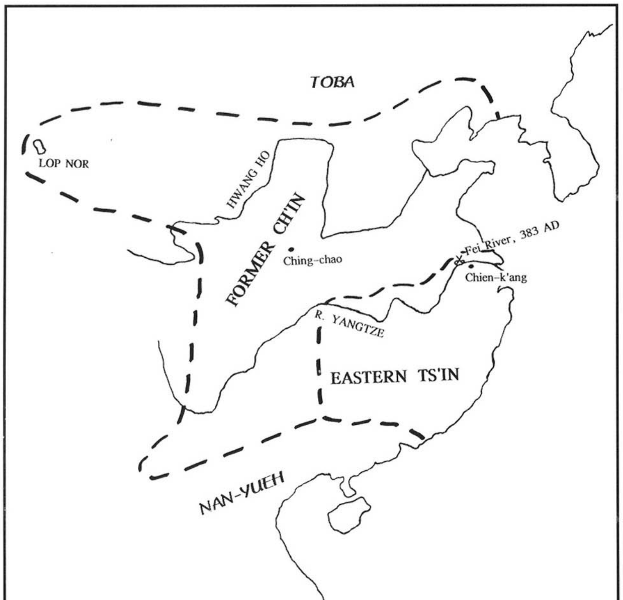
Canals and ships were built for transportation, grain stores were located at strategic points, and eight separate columns were sent to converge on the lower Yangtze. The river itself was cleared by a fleet of huge war-junks manned by Szechwanese marines and equipped with 'striking arms' – heavy iron spikes on the ends of long wooden shafts, which were released to fall onto the decks of enemy ships. At least ten Ch'en war-junks were smashed to pieces by this new weapon, and the Yangtze came under Sui control. The south submitted without further significant resistance. In 589, for the first time since the beginning of the 4th century, China was united under a single ruler.

Pottery figure representing a mounted drummer, 4th–6th centuries. (British Museum)

ARMIES OF THE INVASION PERIOD

The 4th century AD is significant in Chinese military history for the introduction of cataphract equipment for cavalry, and for the first widespread use of stirrups. Whereas in western Asia the rise of fully armoured charging cavalry long pre-dates the invention of the stirrup, in China the two innovations seem to have occurred at about the same time. What little evidence we have suggests that the latter may have been an indigenous development, while complete horse armour appears to have spread from a point of origin in the north-east. The Hsiung-nu in north-west China first obtained panoplies in 312 by capturing them from the Hsien-pi, who had migrated from Manchuria and probably introduced the cataphract horse into China proper. The earliest depiction in art is from the tomb of Tung Shou, a Ts'in warlord buried in what is now Korea, which dates from 357.

It appears that cataphract cavalry spread through China fairly quickly – illustrations from the period 385–94 were found in a tomb in Yunnan in the far south-west – but the tactics best suited to their capabilities took some time to evolve. At one 4th-century battle the Mu-jung Hsien-pi are said to have chained together 5,000 mounted archers to form a solid block which repulsed a series of Hsiung-nu charges. Although the iron chains may be merely a metaphor – it is difficult to imagine a commander going to the trouble of having them forged and then carried along on campaign, or the tribal nobility agreeing to submit to such indignity – it suggests that static shooting formations came into vogue for a time, when nomad cavalry had become too heavily-armoured to skirmish.



THE BRIEF GLORY OF THE FORMER CH'IN: CHINA c. 370 AD.

Other horsemen wielded lances, swords and halberds, as well as bows, but horse-archery remained an important aristocratic accomplishment. Some heroes, such as Ch'en An in 323, are described as wielding lance, sword and bow, apparently simultaneously. Not until the 6th century do we hear of what may have been massed lancers, in a series of encounters in which armoured horsemen overthrew far more numerous enemies. (See the battles of Yeh and Sha-yuan, below.)

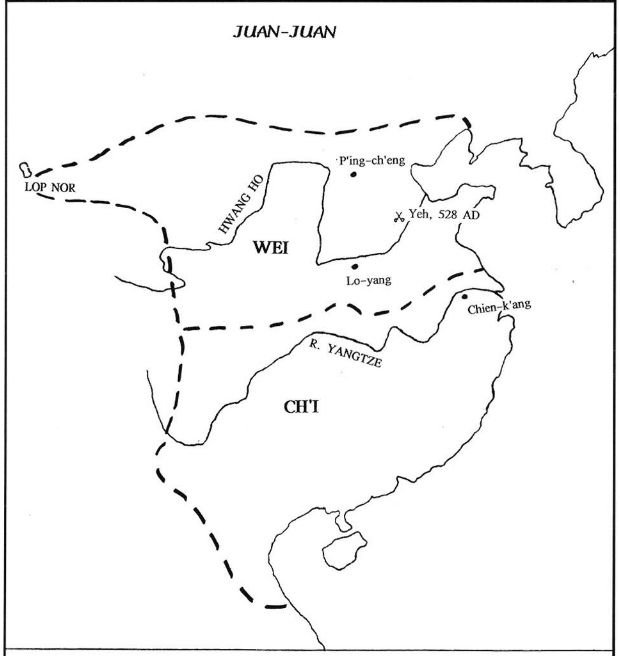
In the 4th century such heavy cavalry was characteristic of the Hsiung-nu and Hsien-pi states, although many poorer tribesmen were no doubt still equipped as light horse-archers. Some early armies consisted entirely of cavalry, but all the barbarians eventually recruited native Chinese infantry; the first to do so was the Hsien-pi Former Yen between 337 and 370. The Ch'iang and Ti provided their own infantry, armed with spears, swords and bows, but they were said to lack steadiness. The Ti empire of Former Ch'in, which briefly dominated the north from 376 to 383, supplemented these with Chinese conscripts, who proved no more reliable. Native cavalrymen were also incorporated into northern armies by the 6th century, supplied by the richer aristocrats, who could afford to provide their own equipment.

Better infantry were raised by the Northern Wei, who set up the 'Three Leaders' system, under which native hamlet, village and district officers were responsible for taxation and conscription. They also re-established the old Han system of frontier garrisons supported by agricultural colonies. At the beginning of the 5th century the nomadic Toba were forcibly settled on the land by Emperor Tao-wu-ti but continued to supply heavy cavalry, backed up by a central reserve of 100,000 horses pastured on imperial grazing grounds along the Yellow River. Less sinicised Hsien-pi tribesmen provided guard units with traditional Chinese names, like the 'Forest of Wings' and 'Tiger Guards' based in Lo-yang.

Outside the regular Wei army and answerable only to the emperor in person were the Ehrchu, a Chieh tribe of central Asian origin, possibly descended from the Yueh-chih whom the Han had met in Sogdiana. The 'iron-clad' Ehrchu owned enormous horse herds and fought as armoured cavalry. There were also nomadic Juan-juan and Kao-ch'e auxiliaries, and, by the mid-6th century under the Western Wei, representatives of the new great power in central Asia – the Turks.

Tomb figurines of the 6th century from the north often depict guardsmen on foot in unwieldy-looking armour which is clearly unsuitable for wearing on horseback. They carry oval or rectangular shields, and often long swords (see Plate G). Chinese infantry of this period are usually depicted in art with sword and shield or with bow, although the crossbow also remained in use. Such footsoldiers were the core of the armies of the native southern dynasties; although cataphract cavalry were known in the south, the lack of good horse-breeding areas restricted their numbers. Despite their nominal control over the far south, the Eastern Ts'in, Liu-Sung, Southern Ch'i and Liang could not rely heavily on the tribesmen of that region; although some progress was made towards assimilation, the presence of Chinese colonists driven from the north during the invasions of the 4th century was a source of unrest, just as it had been under the Han. At one battle in 554, the Liang employed a handful of elephants, but this was an isolated incident.

Bodhidharma, traditionally the founder of the Chinese martial arts, visited Lo-yang c. 520. This 15th-century statue shows the typical garb of a Buddhist monk. (Victoria and Albert Museum)



THE SOUTHERN CH'I AND THE NORTHERN WEI, c. 500 AD.

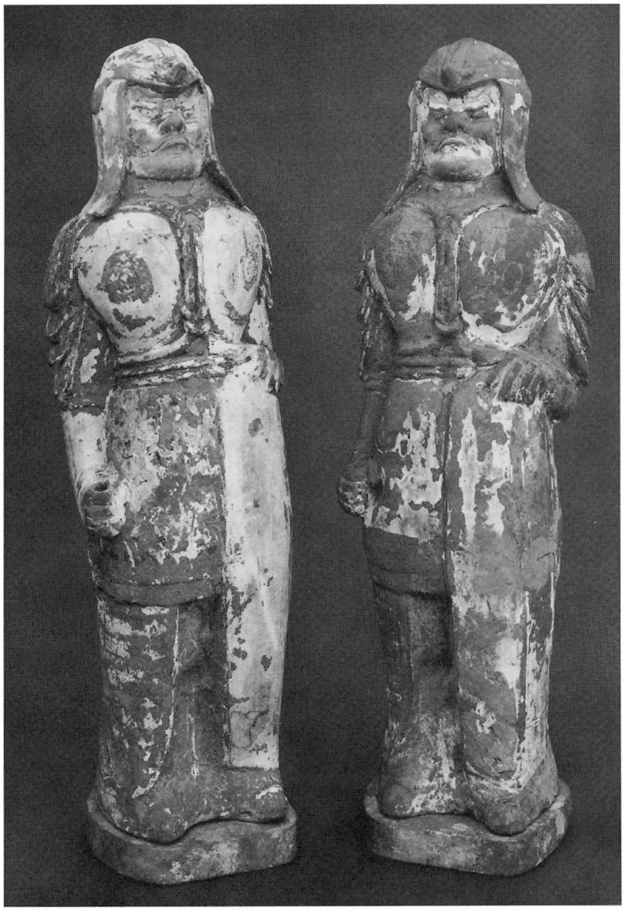
Naval warfare continued to be important in the south. Paddle-wheel ships, worked by a treadmill inside the hull, were first used in battle in 418, terrifying the enemy as they advanced with no visible means of propulsion.

Traditionally, the origin of the oriental martial arts is traced to the visit of a Buddhist monk of Indian or Persian origin, Bodhidharma, to the Shaolin Temple in the territory of the Northern Wei, about AD

520. Bodhidharma was a historical figure, but the tradition cannot be substantiated from official histories and appears to contain many mythical elements. Nevertheless it is not unlikely that a synthesis between certain Buddhist disciplines and the practices of native Chinese secret societies gave rise to an ancestor of modern unarmed fighting techniques at about this time.

THE ART OF WAR IN THE EARLY IMPERIAL AGE

The regimes which followed the Han recruited their civil and military officials from the hereditary aristocracy (the bureaucracy open to talent was an innovation of the Sui and T'ang era). The Toba, for example, awarded rank to anyone who raised the appropriate number of men at his own expense. Even under the Han, military command was primarily an aristocratic privilege, although at the end of the dynasty, Ts'ao Ts'ao was singled out for praise because he 'recognised men of talent and promoted them, irrespective of humble origin'.



6th-century guardsmen, Northern Wei or successors. This style of armour is believed to represent leather – see Plate G. Note the cords which in this case appear to hold the breast plate in position. (British Museum)

We know less about the routine procedures of the Han mobile armies than about the frontier garrisons, but it is evident that the same high standard of professionalism applied to many of their commanders, and that noble birth did not exempt them from the usual harsh system of punishments. Some latitude, however, was permitted to successful generals. Li Kuang was criticised for being lax about discipline and record-keeping, but his critics had to concede that the Hsiung-nu were more afraid of him than of his stricter colleague, Ch'eng Pu-chih.

By the Han era the tradition of military doctrine epitomised by Warring States writers such as Sun Tzu and Wu Ch'i had already been supplemented by hundreds of other works, many of them attributed to famous figures of the remote past. The practice of writing down and codifying the art of war was still very much alive in the period covered here. It may be possible, however, to detect a move away from the psychological approach of the Warring States, based on deception, to a more typically bureaucratic attitude under the Han: the *Three Strategies of Huang Shih-kung*, a work probably of Western Han date, states: 'The basis of complete victory in battle is military administration.' Huo Chu-ping, the famous 'Swift Cavalry General' of the Western Han, was known for his contempt for the ancient texts.

When civil strife re-emerged after the end of the Han it was accompanied by a revival of older doctrines. According to the *Wei Shu*, Ts'ao Ts'ao 'followed in the main the tactics laid down in the "Sun-tzu" and "Wu-tzu" . . . by deceiving the enemy, he won victory; he varied his tactics in demonic fashion'. Ts'ao himself wrote a military manual which all his generals followed when on campaign, and he produced the earliest known commentary on *Sun Tzu*, while another commentary ascribed to Ts'ao's rival, Chu-ko Liang, has become part of the canon of Taoist writings. Although Ts'ao was the best-known practitioner of this style of warfare, ambushes, surprise flank attacks and similar stratagems were very common tactics.

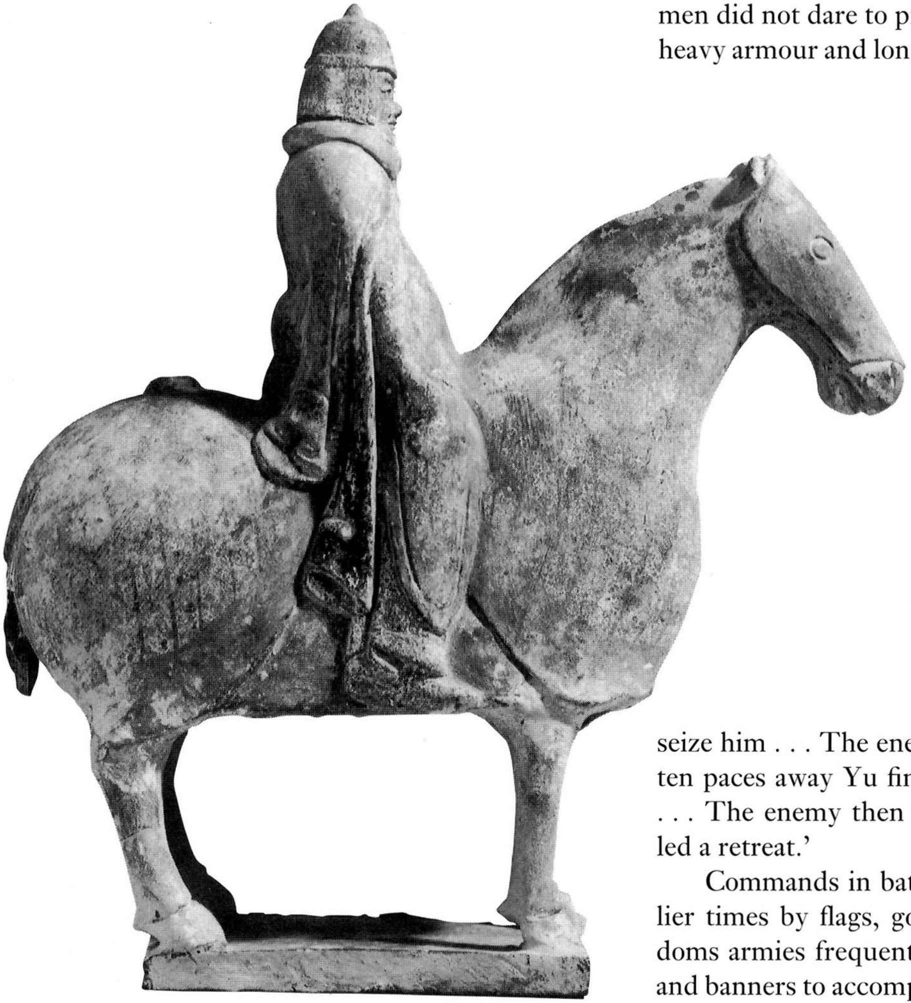
Even under the Han, however, there persisted an even older tradition – that of personal heroics on the part of commanders. Instances of individual officers influencing the outcome of battles or obtaining promotion through acts of personal courage are recorded throughout this period. Three examples will suffice.

During the Wu revolt of 154 BC, Kuan Fu avenged his father's death in Wu captivity with a desperate foray into the rebel camp, accompanied by only a dozen or so mounted followers. Armed with a halberd, he killed or wounded 20 or 30 Wu soldiers and returned covered with wounds. Kuan became famous throughout the Empire for this feat, and the Emperor Ching-ti made him a general.

At a battle against Lu Pu in AD 194, 'Ts'ao Ts'ao called for men to break into the enemy line, and . . . Tien Wei of Ch'en-liu led out a group of volunteers . . . Wei said to his men, "When the enemy are ten paces away, then report it." The other men said "Ten paces!" He said again "Tell me when it's five paces." The others were frightened and shouted at once, "They're here!" Holding a halberd, Wei rose up and roared defiance. Whenever he struck there was none who could stand against his blow. Pu's forces retreated.'

At an encounter in AD 538 a leading general of the Western Wei, Ts'ai Yu, 'dismounted and fought on foot, and killed several men with his own hands . . . the enemy surrounded him ten or so deep and called to him, "You appear to be a brave knight, sir. If you would but put aside your armour and surrender, can you believe you would be without riches and honours?" Yu cursed them . . . The Eastern Wei men did not dare to press him but called up one with heavy armour and long sword to advance directly and seize him . . . The enemy slowly advanced and when ten paces away Yu finally shot him right in the face . . . The enemy then withdrew a bit and Yu slowly led a retreat.'

Commands in battle were transmitted as in earlier times by flags, gongs and drums. Three Kingdoms armies frequently used large numbers of flags and banners to accompany feint manoeuvres and give



Cataphract, Northern Wei. Figures of this type are very common and suggest that clothing was often worn over armour. The Ehrchu who sacked Lo-yang in 528 wore white, in mourning for the young emperor, Hsiao-ming-ti. (British Museum) the impression of a much larger force. Military music was important throughout the period, and attacks were accompanied by a roar of drums in an attempt to inspire the attackers and demoralise the enemy. It was sometimes thought possible to judge the chances of success of an army by the quality of its music. The Northern Wei had flute music, 'the sound of which turned cowards into heroes, and made swordsmen long for action', and some martial songs of the Liang, adapted from northern tunes, have been preserved.

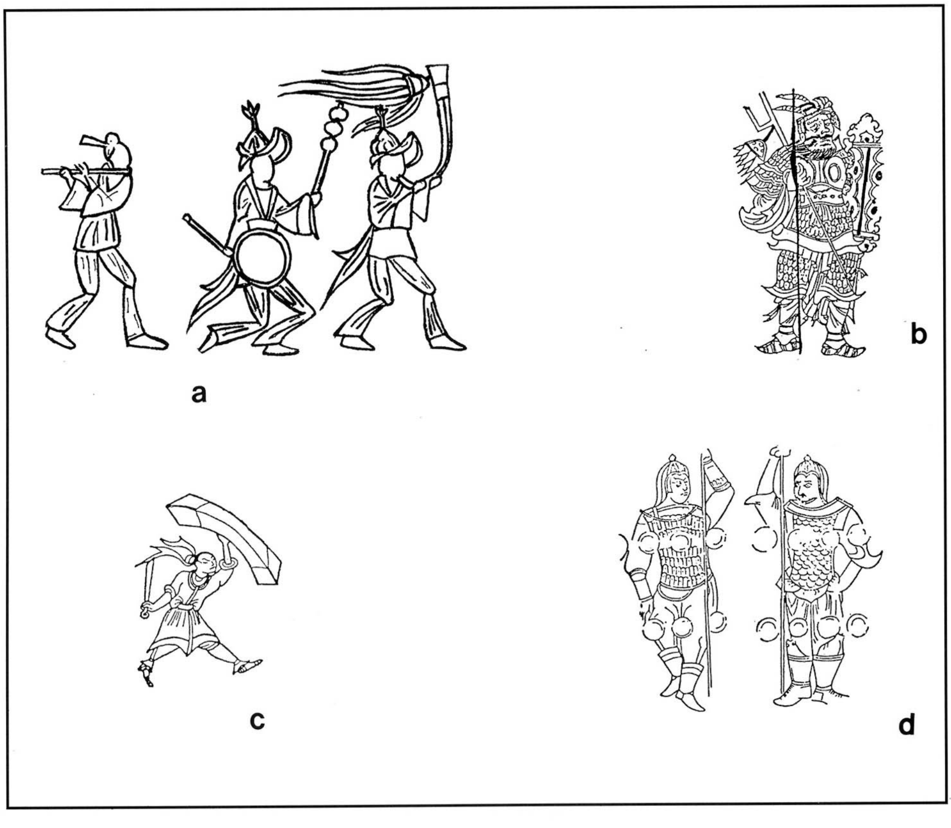
10 SIGNIFICANT BATTLES

Wei River, 203 BC

During the civil wars with Ch'u, which led to the foundation of the Han dynasty, Han Hsin faced Lung Chu of Ch'u and his Ch'i allies across the Wei River. During the night, Han Hsin ordered his men to fill more than 10,000 sandbags and block the river upstream. He led his army over to the west bank to attack Lung Chu, then pretended to flee. Lung, exclaiming 'I always knew Han Hsin was a coward!' pursued him back over the Wei, whereupon the Han broke open the temporary dam. Most of the Ch'u army was not able to follow Lung across the rapidly rising river, so he was trapped on the far bank and killed. Lung's Ch'i allies withdrew on seeing this, and the Ch'u fled. Han Hsin followed and captured most of them.

T'ien Shan, 99 BC

A campaign was planned against the Hsiung-nu in the T'ien Shan mountains, west of Mongolia, utilising 5,000 Chinese infantry led by Li Ling and a force of cavalry under Liu Po-te. Liu objected to serving under Li, and whether by accident or design the cavalry was sent to the wrong place. Li Ling advanced into the steppes regardless, apparently believing that the Hsiung-nu could be defeated by infantry alone. When he reached the mountains he was surrounded by 30,000 nomad cavalry. Li set up a camp between two mountains, protected by a wagon laager, then deployed his men with spears and shields in the front rank and crossbowmen behind. The Hsiung-nu attacked, but the crossbows drove them off, leaving



6th-century infantry from reliefs and wall paintings: a) Southern Ch'i or Liang musicians from Teng-hsien, Honan, c. AD 500; b) Door-guardian, Northern Wei, dated to AD 529; c) Tun-huang, c. AD 500; d) Tomb of Li Ho, AD 582. The figure on the right appears to be wearing scale armour – unusual at this late date.

several thousand dead. Li retired towards the Chinese frontier, fighting rearguard actions on the way, but eventually ran short of ammunition. The barbarians ambushed him in a defile near the frontier, blocking the path and rolling rocks down the slopes. Some of the Chinese fled, but Li and the remaining 3,000 fought on, the crossbowmen using cart axles as makeshift spears. After dark Li ordered his men to disperse and break out, but only 400 escaped. Li Ling was captured by the Hsiung-nu.

Kang-chu, 36 BC

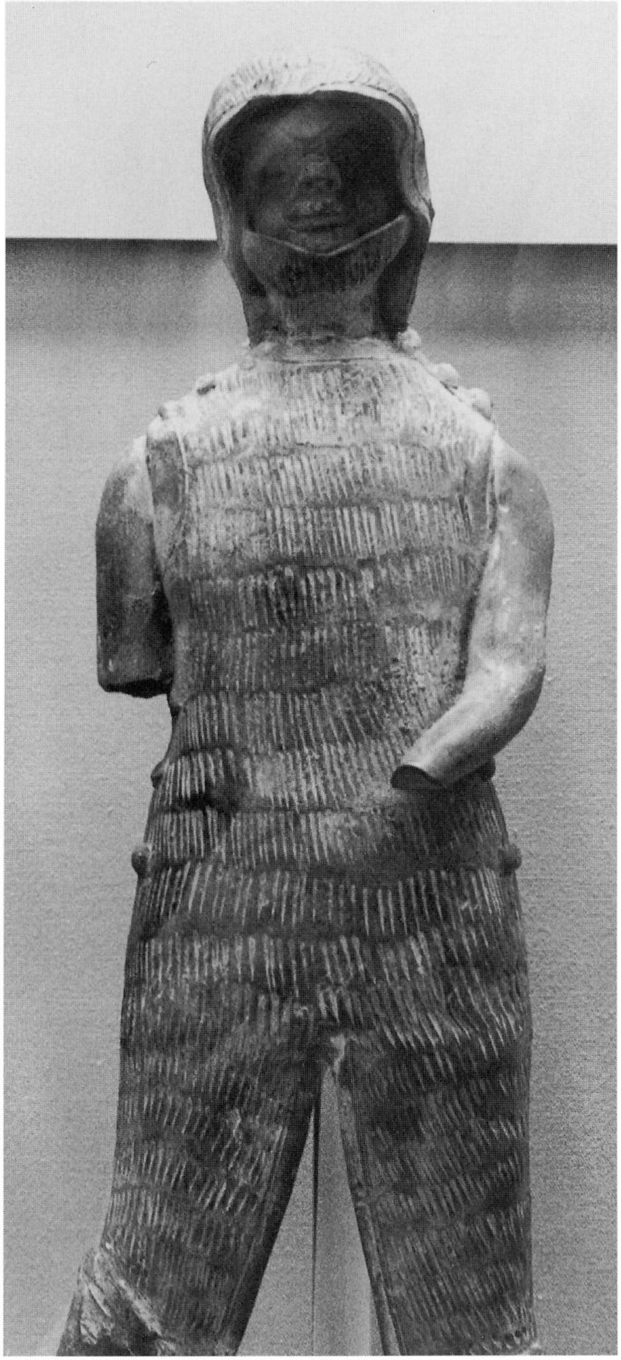
Chih Chih, one of several rival claimants for the title of Shan-yu of the Hsiung-nu, set himself up in Kang-chu in Sogdiana, where he antagonised the Han by raiding their allies, the Wu-sun. At the time, the protector general of the Western Regions, Kan Yen-shou, was ill, so his second-in-command, Ch'en T'ang – believing that the threat to the trade routes required immediate action – forged an imperial decree authorising him to raise troops for a campaign. On his recovery Kan went along with this, and in 36 BC they led 40,000 men west in two separate columns, travelling north and south of the Takla Makan desert. Chih Chih may have thought that supply problems would prevent the Chinese campaigning so far afield, but on arrival in Sogdiana, Kan and Ch'en took fresh provisions by capturing the livestock which the Sogdians had taken from the Wu Sun.

Chih Chih was occupying a town on the Tu-lai River; outside the earth wall, the stronghold was defended by a wooden palisade sheltering archers, while 100 Sogdian cavalry and 100 infantry were drawn up outside the defences. (Dubs' theory that the infantry were Roman legionaries captured by the Parthians at Carrhae need not be taken seriously.) The cavalry charged the Han army as it made camp nearby, but was beaten off by crossbowmen. The Chinese then advanced, with men carrying 'great shields' in front and spears and crossbows behind. Protected by a barrage of crossbow bolts which drove the defenders from the walls, they drained the moat, then stacked firewood against the palisade and burnt it. That night a Sogdian relief force of 10,000 cavalry appeared and made several charges against the Han camp, but was driven off. Chih Chih, shooting from a tower, was outshot by the crossbowmen. Many of the women of his harem were killed and Chih Chih was wounded. At dawn the Chinese broke into the town. The king's palace was set alight and stormed, and Chih Chih was stabbed to death and beheaded. Kan and Ch'en were pardoned for the crime of falsifying imperial documents, but the court was reluctant to reward them, fearing the consequences of encouraging other officials to undertake such adventures.

Military official, AD 580–620. Another example of the cloaked and helmeted warrior style, from the Northern Chou or Sui. (Victoria and Albert Museum)

Ch'eng-tu, AD 36

After the overthrow of Wang Mang the Empire remained in disorder, with several local warlords setting themselves up as independent kings. Kung-sun Shu, king of Shu in modern Szechwan, blocked the Yangtze Gorges with a floating bridge, fortified with towers and supported by defensive works on both banks of the river. A Han fleet using towered warships and rowed assault boats attacked and burnt the bridge and advanced upstream, supporting an overland attack on Ch'eng-tu, Kung-sun's capital. However, the terrain caused delays, and when the Han army arrived outside the city it had only one week's provisions left. It took up position in two widely separated camps while its commander made preparations for a withdrawal. Kung-sun led a sortie out of the city at this point and attacked one of the camps. Liu Shang, in command of the other camp, led an unexpected counterattack in which Kung-sun was fatally wounded, demoralising his army. Ch'eng-tu surrendered the next day.



This cavalryman from the Northern Wei wears lamellar liang-tang *('double-faced armour') fastened over the shoulders and down the sides. What appears to be a complete one-piece suit may be intended to represent a combination of the customary front and rear torso-pieces with chaps for the legs. His foreign features suggest that he may be one of the 'iron-clad' Ehrchu who fought against the mutinous Six Garrisons. (British Museum)*

Kuan-tu, AD 200

When Ts'ao Ts'ao faced his rival Yuan Shao in what was described at the time as the 'great crisis of the Empire', he was at first driven back by the sheer weight of numbers, and he entrenched himself in a fortified camp at Kuan-tu in north-east China. Yuan Shao laid siege to the camp, shooting artillery from towers and an artificial mound. Ts'ao's own stone-throwers replied and gained the advantage, so Yuan tried tunnelling. This also failed because Ts'ao had dug a moat within the fortifications. Both sides were running short of supplies when a defector informed Ts'ao that a large supply train, escorted by 10,000 men, was attempting to rendezvous with Yuan's army. Ts'ao extricated 5,000 horse and foot from his camp by night and intercepted the column, bottling up the escorting troops within their own improvised defences. Yuan Shao meanwhile attacked Ts'ao's camp again, but was still unsuccessful. He also sent a force of cavalry to relieve the supply column, but before it arrived Ts'ao had attacked and captured it. Yuan's army was demoralised by this setback and several of his officers defected. Yuan himself escaped across the Yellow River, leaving behind his baggage and 70,000 casualties.

Hsien-mei, AD 221

Chang Chi, commanding a Wei army, was threatened by several thousand nomad cavalry. The Wei were tired, after several long marches, and their morale suffered when strong winds blew up and they feared that the enemy would take advantage of this to set fire to their camp. Chang, however, deployed 3,000 men in ambush positions under cover of darkness, then sent Ch'eng Kung-yin with 1,000 cavalry to provoke the enemy. The Wei horsemen made a feint attack and then fell back, luring their pursuers into a series of ambushes. The undisciplined barbarians were hit from front and rear and were massacred. Tens of thousands were captured, along with huge numbers of sheep and cattle.

The Siege of Ch'en-ts'ang, AD 229

Chu-ko Liang of Shu besieged the Wei city of Ch'en-ts'ang, held by Hao Chou. Hao rejected a summons to surrender, so the Shu army, which outnumbered the defenders by ten to one, launched an assault using scaling ladders, supported by artillery shooting from wooden towers. The defenders burned the ladders with incendiary missiles, and used millstones swung on ropes to demolish the towers. Chu-ko then filled in the moat and attacked again, but although the outer wall fell, Hao Chou had built another wall inside the original, and this continued to hold. The Shu tried tunnelling, but the Wei dug their own tunnels to intercept them. The city held out for more than 20 days, and by the time a Wei relief force arrived, Chu-ko, short of supplies, had already given up and left.

Fei River, AD 383

By 376 the Former Ch'in dynasty of the Ti warlord Fu Chien had established itself as the leading power in north China. Fu planned to reunite the Empire by conquering the Eastern Ts'in in the south, and raised an enormous army, said to have comprised 600,000 infantry and 360,000 cavalry, including Ti tribesmen, Hsien-pi and Hsiung-nu cavalry and conscripted Chinese infantry. When warned of the difficulties of the campaign and the poor state of training of his heterogenous army, Fu preferred to rely on weight of numbers, saying, 'My army is so huge that if all the men throw their whips into the Yangtze this will suffice to cover it.' However, as they approached the Yangtze valley in separated columns, the cavalry suffered in the unhealthy marshes, and it proved impossible for supply wagons to keep pace. Cavalry and infantry became hopelessly mixed up. The Ts'in forces under Hsieh Hsuan, though greatly outnumbered, ambushed the attackers at various points and concentrated swiftly against isolated units. Some of these were destroyed; others were bribed to retire. The coordination of the Ch'in columns soon broke down, and at the Fei River, Fu Chien ordered a tactical withdrawal. According to one account, the intention was to lure the Ts'in army across the river onto more open ground, but Ts'in agents raised the cry 'Ch'in is defeated!' and panic spread. Fu's army disintegrated in rout; only one Mu-jung Hsien-pi unit withdrew intact, accompanied by Fu and 1,000 cavalry. The Ts'in followed up, and over half the Ch'in force was slaughtered in the pursuit.

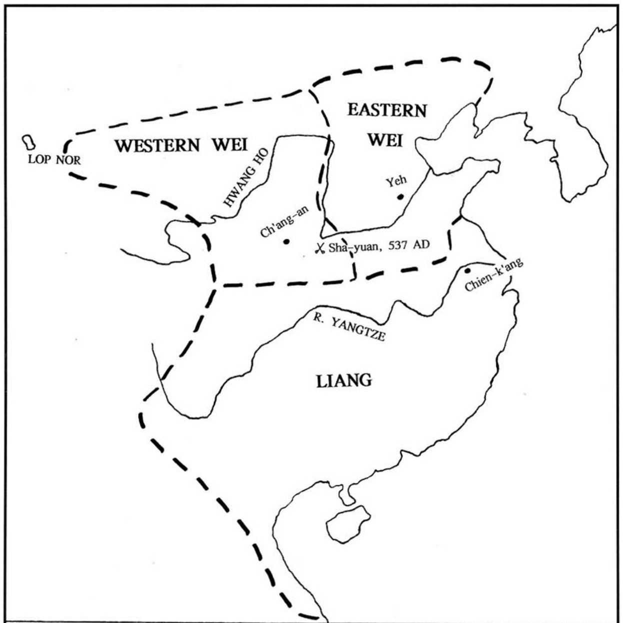
Yeh, AD 528

After the Ehrchu, under their chieftain, Jung, had placed their own nominee on the throne of the Wei Empire, they faced an invasion by a huge army, said to have been a million strong, from the mutinous Six Garrisons. The mutineers advanced across the Yellow River plain north of the city of Yeh in a great crescent measuring several miles from tip to tip. Ehrchu Jung had only 7,000 cavalrymen, so he split

Horse from north China, late 6th-century. (British Museum) them into small units to raise dust and make noise in order to conceal their lack of numbers. Then, concentrating them against part of the enemy line, he led a massed charge. The use of swords was forbidden, apparently in order to prevent men breaking ranks to take heads, and the troopers were issued with a weapon called *shen-pang*, to be held beside the horse. Unfortunately the nature of this weapon is not entirely clear; it has been suggested that it was an early example of the use of the couched lance, but the name translates as 'miraculous cudgel', so it may have been a type of mace. The Ehrchu broke right through the mutineers and wheeled to come at them from the rear, routing them and capturing their commander.

Sha-yuan, AD 537

During the wars which followed the collapse of the Northern Wei, the successor state of Eastern Wei sent an advanced guard in three columns through the T'ong Pass to attack Western Wei. The Western army, under Yu-wen T'ai, concentrated against one column and defeated it; the others then retreated. Yu-wen followed up, only to run into the main Eastern army, which was alleged to number 200,000. The Westerners were pushed back through the pass, but as the Eastern army emerged from the mountains it was unexpectedly charged in the flank by 10,000 Western cavalry, and 6,000 Easterners were killed and 70,000 captured. This was the most celebrated victory in a series of attacks and counterattacks through the T'ong Pass which lasted until 542.



CHINA, c. 540 AD.

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THE PLATES

A: Han chariot

The four-horse chariot continued in use with Han armies until the 1st century BC, but although it was traditionally considered a vital constituent of the armed forces, its role was increasingly usurped by the cavalry, and its main function by Han times was probably as transport for high-ranking officers.

This illustration is based on a reconstructed vehicle from the tomb of Ch'in Shih Huang-ti – a few years before the rise of the Han – but war-chariot design was not changing much at that time. Chariot horses in earlier periods were often barded, but there is no evidence of this practice under the Han. The large circular canopy often seen on representations of vehicles in non-military contexts does not seem to be very practical for combat, and has been omitted from this reconstruction. Yellow was adopted as the colour of the Western Han dynasty in 104 BC, replacing black, which had been the Imperial colour of the Ch'in. The Eastern Han later used red.

The spearman is shown wearing armour of numerous laced iron plates, based on an excavated example from the Western Han tomb of Prince Liu Sheng at Man-ch'eng. Such an obviously heavy and expensive cuirass would probably have been worn by an officer of high rank. In battle, an archer or crossbowman like ***B3*** would have ridden beside him.

B: Infantry of the Western Han

These figures are derived from the miniature 'terracotta army' from Yang-chia-wan near Sian, which comprises over 2,000 pottery figurines and is believed to date from the early 2nd century BC.

B1: Spearman

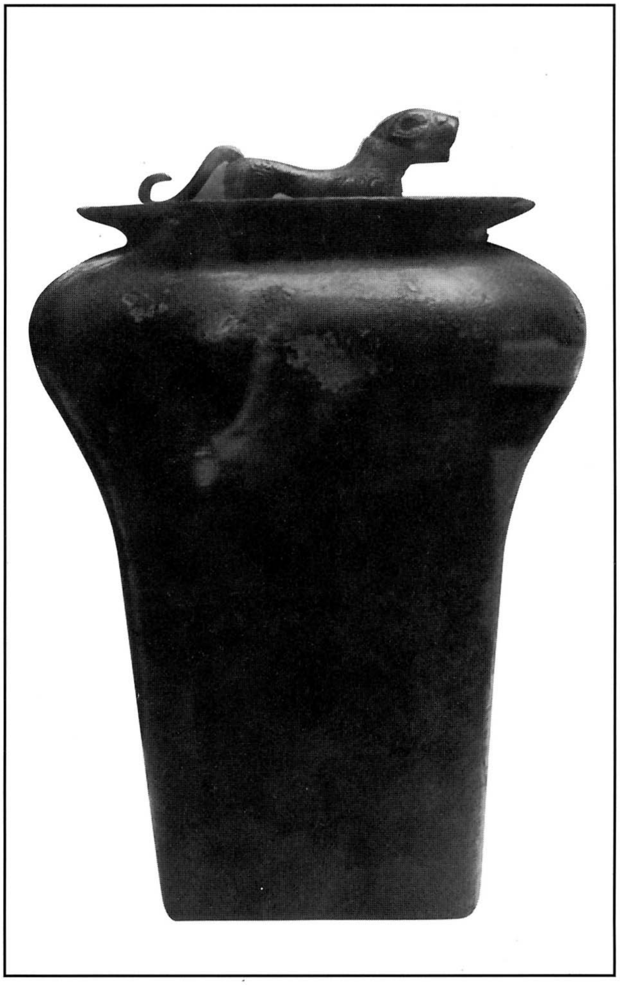
This man wears a leather lamellar cuirass tied over the shoulders with cords. The weapons are missing from the original figures, but that depicted here is a typical Han derivative of the ancient 'dagger-axe', combining the functions of spear and halberd. A shield like that of ***B2*** could also be carried.

B2: Swordsman

The sword was also an important weapon in the Han period, being used by both infantry and cavalry, and featuring in many of Ssu-ma Ch'ien's battle accounts. This one is based on a bronze example in the British Museum. Note the gilded ring-pommel – a common feature of Han swords. By this time iron was beginning to overtake bronze as the most common metal for weapons as casting techniques improved. Several of the Yang-chia-wan figurines bear this painted design on their shields.

B3: Crossbowman

Although depicted without armour in order to show the appearance of the ordinary soldier's robe, missile troops could also be armoured. Crossbows varied in size and draw-weight, and carvings of Han period tomb-guardians show that the normal method of cocking the larger ones was still to place both feet on the bow on either side of the stock and pull up the string with two hands, while holding the bolt in the teeth. Figurines from the Han and later periods seldom show swords being worn by men equipped with other weapons, and the meticulous records excavated at Edsin-gol also suggest that side-arms were not routinely issued. No doubt the difficulty of manufacturing sufficient swords for the Han mass armies precluded this.

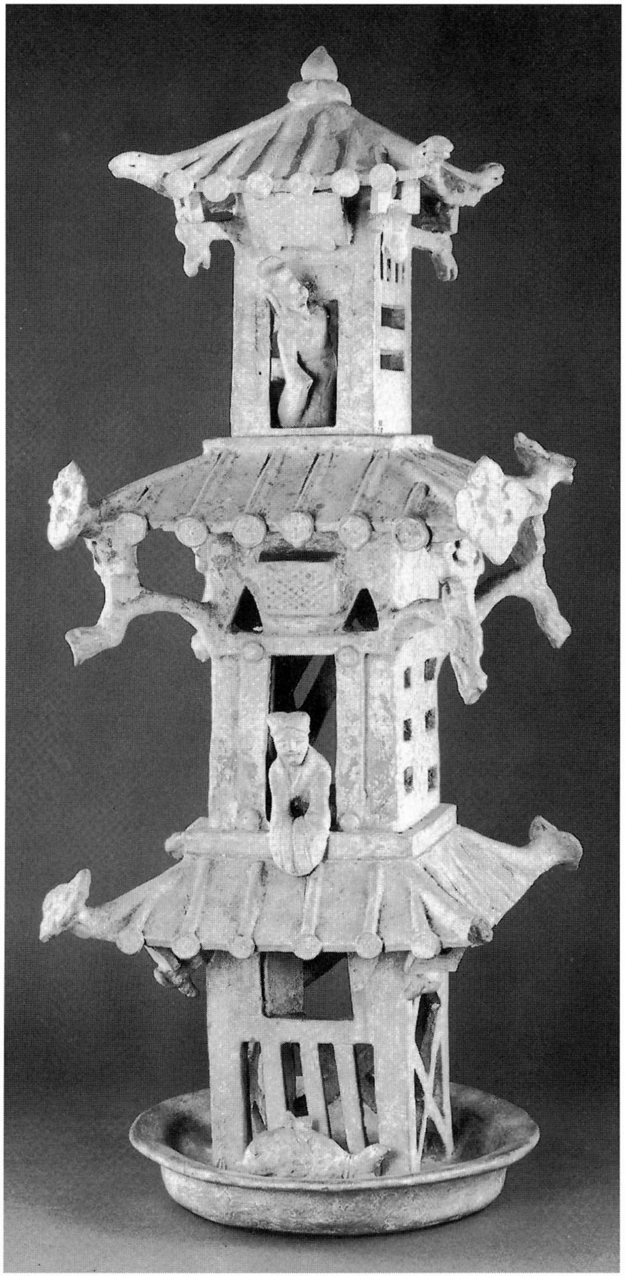


Martial music had a prominent role in early Chinese warfare. This bronze drum from Szechwan is dated to the Western Han period. (British Museum)

C: Han cavalry

C1: Lancer

Based on a bronze statuette from a tomb at Wu-wei in the far north-west combined with armour from the Yang-chia-wan figures, this man represents the typical lightly equipped close-combat cavalryman of the Han. A clue to the method of employing the halberd in action is provided by a relief which appears to show a mounted archer being hooked off his horse with the projecting blade.



C2: Mounted archer

The majority of Han cavalry were probably unarmoured, and both Chinese and 'barbarian' allies such as the Wu-huan were skilled at archery. This costume is derived from a mounted figurine from Yang-chia-wan. His backwards-shooting pose is shown on numerous reliefs. The Hsiung-nu were similarly equipped, although they were often fair-haired and wore pigtails instead of the tied-up hair typical of the Chinese. (See Elite 30, *Attila and the Nomad Hordes*, for a reconstruction of a Hsiung-nu nobleman.) Late Han art shows Wu-huan or Hsien-pi horse-archers with shaven heads and wearing reddish-brown clothing.

D: Infantry of the Eastern Han

D1: Archer

A well-known relief from Wu-liang-tzu, in modern Shantung, probably of late Han date, depicts warriors in loose, flowing robes and caps. This may reflect artistic preferences rather than any drastic change in dress during the Eastern Han, and such unarmoured men were to be found throughout the period, as was proved by the similar Shi-chi-shan figurines discovered in 1984. The watchtower in the background is based on a pottery model in the British Museum, and is typical of Han architectural styles.

D2: Vietnamese auxiliary

As the Han expanded into the south, they encountered the warriors of Yueh – a vast territory extending into present-day Vietnam – both as allies and enemies. Vietnamese graves from this period show a mixture of Chinese and local weaponry, and this picture represents a semi-sinicised auxiliary wearing a combination of Han and native dress. In the 3rd century AD the Vietnamese were described as having their hair tied up and wearing a piece of cloth with a hole cut in it for the head. Bamboo bows were popular weapons, and this man's spoon-shaped bronze sword is a characteristic south-Chinese type based on an example from Hong Kong. Crossbows, spears and 'boot-shaped' axes were also used. Other southern tribal groups were distinguished by their appearance: many warriors of the south-west tied up

Pottery model of a watchtower, Han dynasty. (British Museum)

their hair into a 'mallet-shaped' topknot, while the K'un-ming wore long pigtails. The neighbouring Ai-lao tattooed themselves with dragon motifs and stretched their earlobes until they hung down to their shoulders.

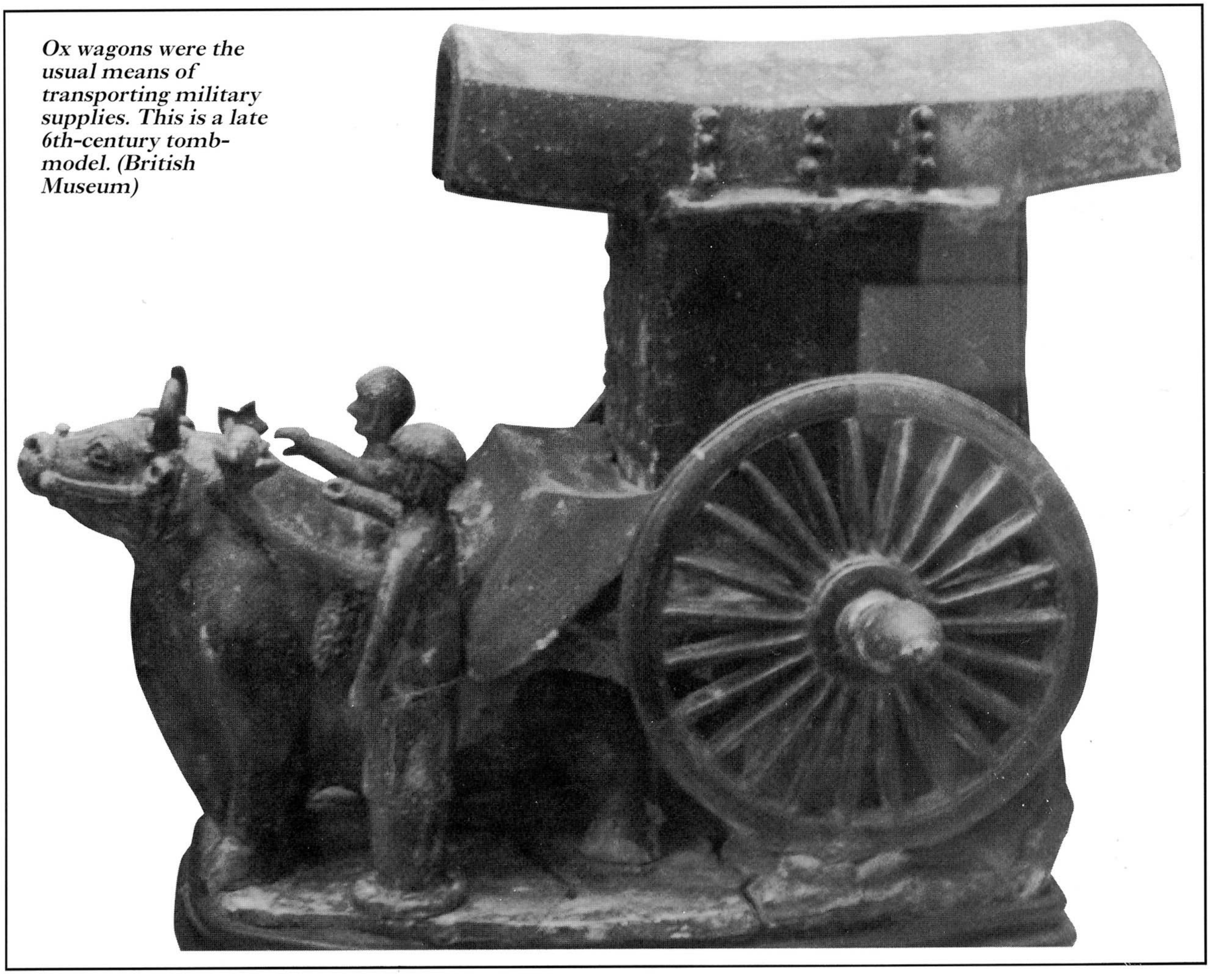
D3: Late Han or Ts'in armoured infantryman

A common type of tomb-guardian figure, probably dating from the 3rd century AD, confirms that armour continued to be worn. This figure has been reconstructed with a conical iron helmet and leather scale armour, although body armour could also be of iron. Similar helmets appear on an Eastern Han mural from Holingol. It is possible that the distinctive facial features of these figures are meant to emphasise that the warriors they represent are foreigners. They are also often in poses which suggest that they are throwing their spears – a habit not typical of the Chinese. This man could therefore be a member of a barbarian tribe such as the Ch'iang, who infiltrated the north-west in large numbers under the Eastern Han and later established their own Chinese-style dynasty, the Later Ch'in (AD 384–417). The Ch'iang are known to have used armour, but unlike the Hsiung-nu and Hsien-pi, they fought mostly as infantry. Ch'iang women also bore arms, and in the late Han period Chinese women in the north-west are reported to have become warriors under Ch'iang influence.

E: The Three Kingdoms

E1: Armoured cavalryman

Written accounts suggest that horse armour was beginning to appear by the end of the Han, but the earliest surviving representation dates from AD 302 and shows this rudimentary barding. This is there-



Ox wagons were the usual means of transporting military supplies. This is a late 6th-century tomb-model. (British Museum)

Scabbard slide of carved and lacquered wood, Han dynasty. (British Museum)

fore an attempt to reconstruct one of the minority of men on armoured horses who fought in the wars of the Three Kingdoms. The single stirrup was used for mounting only; the true riding stirrup may be illustrated on an isolated Eastern Han relief, but its use did not become widespread until the 4th century AD. The rider's armour and equipment are based on a Wei or Ts'in period wall painting from Chia-yu-kuan. Iron armour could be highly polished and was known as *hei-kuang* ('black-brilliant') or *ming-kuang* ('bright-brilliant'). One figure from Chia-yu-kuan carries both lance and bow, the latter in a case on the right-hand side as shown here.

E2: North-western rebel

In AD 211 Ts'ao Ts'ao defeated an army from 'within the passes' – the ancient Ch'in homeland – despite the exceptionally long spears with which its infantry were equipped. The term used for this weapon is the same as that for the 18-foot chariot spear of the Warring States, but its precise appearance is unknown. This reconstruction is derived from a painting from Chia-yu-kuan, in the same north-western region. The 'corkscrew' hairstyle is a feature of a number of figurines from the Lo-yang area, and may indicate a non-Chinese origin.

E3: Wheelbarrow

The wheelbarrow was probably invented in China during the Han period, and the famous commander Chu-ko Liang of Shu Han pioneered its use for supplying his armies. The vehicles could also be used to form a temporary barrier to enemy troops. This reconstruction, although based on a much later example, is typical of the traditional Chinese wheelbarrow.

F: The Northern dynasties, 4th–6th Centuries

F1: Cataphract cavalryman

Full armour for horse and rider was adopted in China during the 4th century AD. Statuettes and paintings depicting such equipment are fairly plentiful, and this figure is based on several sources – a complete one-piece horse armour from an early 6th-century wall painting at Tun-huang; an excavated lamellar cuirass from a tomb dated to AD 582; and skirt and armoured chaps from what is probably a 5th-century model of a Hsien-pi horseman in the Historical

Museum, Peking. The overhead lance thrust is also shown in the Tun-huang painting (lances are the weapons most commonly depicted), but written evidence shows that swords, halberds and bows could also be carried. Some men appear to have dispensed with protection for the arms, possibly to facilitate the use of the bow.

F2: Armoured archer

Several pottery figurines depict archers with a distinctive combination of equipment and facial features. From this it has been deduced that they may represent a specific non-Chinese unit, but it is possible that they are simply the result of artistic convention. All wear this type of *liang-tang* or 'double-faced' armour, consisting of front and back pieces joined over the shoulders by straps. This may in many cases have been leather, but *liang-tang* armour of iron is mentioned in a song of the Liang dynasty.

G: Infantry of the northern dynasties

G1: Frontier guard, Northern Wei

This man, based on a figurine from Shansi dated to *c.* AD 480, provides a vivid picture of the reality of garrison life on the northern frontier in winter, and is probably typical of such troops throughout the period covered here. He wears a fur hat and coat, and carries a shield taken from another model of similar date in the British Museum. (See Elite 30, *Attila and the Nomad Hordes*, for other reconstructions of Toba troops of the Northern Wei.)

G2: Armoured infantryman, Northern Ch'i

The model on which this man is based – excavated from the 6th-century tomb of the daughter-in-law of Kao Huan, the founder of the Northern Ch'i – is typical of the heavy infantry of the states which succeeded the Northern Wei in North China. This type of armour – a variant of that described by Dien as '*liang-tang* armour with plaques' – presents some difficulties of interpretation, especially because what are described as 'plaques' on the chest are often recessed on the models, suggesting that they may not be pieces sewn on for additional protection as is usually assumed. However, an alternative explanation – that they are cut-outs in a surcoat revealing a metal plate cuirass beneath – is unlikely in view of the total absence of archaeological evidence for such plate armour. This figure has the plaques as additional chest protection sewn onto lacquered leather body armour – an admittedly clumsy arrangement in sharp contrast to the mainstream of Chinese armour development.

G3: Sui guardsman

From a tomb figure of AD 595 from Anyang, this man represents a military official or palace guardsman of the late 6th century. Although he wears typical *liang-tang* armour – here with the lamellae hidden under a fabric cover – the rest of his dress is classically Chinese, illustrating the resurgence of native traditions under the Northern Chou dynasty and the Sui which succeeded it. The long sword, carried in a scabbard, is typical of guardsmen from the 6th century until the end of the Sung.

H: The southern dynasties

H1: Armoured horse and groom, Liang dynasty

This figure, carved on a brick from Teng-hsien in modern Honan, dated to *c.* AD 500, shows that fully-armoured horses were also in use in the south. Unlike the single-piece armour of ***F1***, this is made in five main sections – the chanfron for the head, neck guard, chest and shoulder guard, flank pieces and crupper. The long plume attached to the latter is often seen in art in both north and south – and also in contemporary Korea – but its exact nature is not clear. In view of its apparent defiance of gravity it cannot have been constructed of heavy material, and it has been interpreted here as consisting of feathers. (Pheasant-tail plumes are mentioned in a military context in Liang poetry.)

H2: Swordsman

This figure, from the same source as ***H1***, forms part of a procession of alternating swordsmen and archers. This may be an artistic convention, or may indicate the existence of mixed units (though there is no literary evidence from this period to support this hypothesis). The curved shield is associated with swordsmen in art, in contrast to the rectangular or oval types which would have been more suitable for spearmen accustomed to fighting in close formations.

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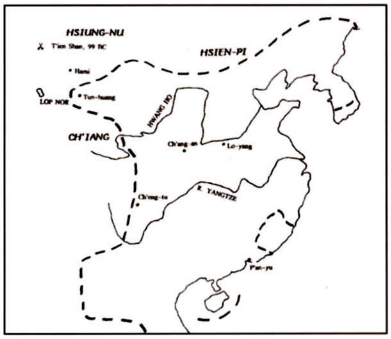
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